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The prayer of advent

Syd Hielema

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen (excerpts from Rev. 22).

When you peel away the layers on all the prayers that Christians pray, at the very centre we always find the same short prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus." Advent is not just the five week period before Christmas during which we light candles; Advent describes the entire life of the believer walking in the now and the not yet. In all of our prayers we praise and thank the Lord for the countless ways in which he has come into our lives and our world (the "now") and we long for his promises to be fulfilled, step-by-step in our own lives and ultimately and irrevocably at the end of time (the "not yet").

And so we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Trees of blessing

With John, we see the tree of life in the New Jerusalem, and we remember that we are called to be trees of blessing now that anticipate that wondrous tree. Both personally and with our communities we are like a Psalm 1 tree, "planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither" (vs. 3). Our treeness evokes the two-edged Advent prayer within us: "thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming and growing the nourishing fruit and the healing leaves through your Spirit within us" (Gal. 5:22-23), we pray, followed by "come, Lord Jesus, prune our dying branches (John 15:2), heal our own struggling leaves, and come again so that the final tree of life may bless your new creation forever."

Like John, we are overwhelmed by both the indescribable beauty of God's presence and promises and the profound grip of sin and brokenness. Like John, confused by these overwhelming realities, we bow before the angel instead of the Lord, because "we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" on the way to the time when "we shall see face to face" (I Cor. 13:12).

Confusion marks the Advent journey as it navigates the now and the not yet. As that confusion calls forth the "Come, Lord Jesus" cry, it becomes *holy confusion*. It becomes a humbling but peace-filled confusion that the Lord uses to mature us as his children and to strengthen our groaning for all things to be made new (Rom. 8:23). It becomes Advent confusion that drives us to our knees before the coming King.

The community whose entire life is shaped by that simple prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus," is the community whose fruit and whose leaves bless the world in which "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee (the Savior) tonight." Let that prayer flourish at the centre of your being.

This oil painting by Latvian artist Ingmara Zalite playfully includes a Christmas tree in the traditional nativity scene. See page 2 to find out why.

News

Art brings healing at the Sanctuary Church

Bethany Van Lingen

Traci Noble has gone from living on the streets to hanging her art on the walls of the Sanctuary Church in downtown Toronto. Noble told her success story to the crowd at the Sanctuary's November 12th arts eXtravaganza evening. As a child, Noble was abused by her parents. She jumped from one foster home to another. At 13, Noble sexually abused two girls.

"It was the lowest point of my life," Noble told the audience. "I thought I was playing house."

Noble left high school at 15 and began living on the streets. She moved from shelter to shelter in Toronto. "I lived in every one of them that there was. Any one you can think of, I was in it," Noble said.

Today, at 30, Noble has her own place in Jamestown, Toronto and has started her

Noble holds Spartakyss in front of Sanctuary.

own business.

Noble went back to high school 11 years after leaving, and got her diploma. She went on to participate in the UforChange program, a federally-funded arts program for youth. She learned about photography in the program.

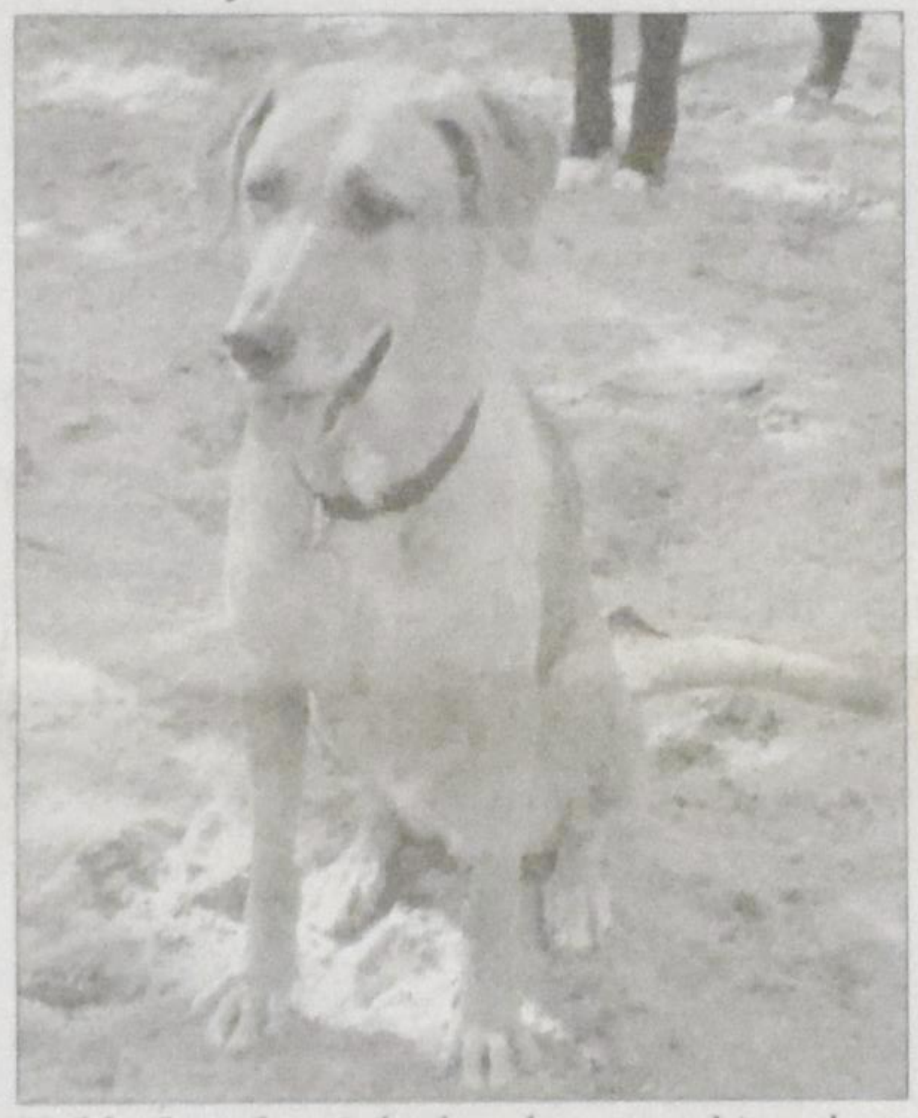
After she was laid off from her job at a pet grooming business, Noble began to photograph dogs.

Noble has created a business as a photographer of dogs called Pause for Paws Photography. She has designed her own website, and gets her shots by putting her subject at ease.

"I go to dog parks. I try to find where the dog feels comfortable," Noble said.

After sharing her story and photographs at the arts eXtravaganza, Noble was able to book a new photo shoot with a client. She proudly announced the booking to the crowd later in the evening.

Noble has been a part of the Sanctuary for two or three years. She has found community there.



Noble found a niche by photographing dogs.

Creative outlets

"My family is blood, my street family is my family because I love them the most," she said.

Noble surprised the event organizer, Lyf Stolte, with the desire to share her story at the arts eXtravaganza. "I knew that she came to a lot of the drop-ins and that she was street involved, but I had no idea what her story was," Stolte said. "It was amazing to hear." Noble said she chose to tell her story because she had "changed dramatically." "I'm a better person now," she said.

Audrey Sheppard, of Toronto and a participant in programs at the Sanctuary, shared her paintings of cartoons at the arts eXtravaganza. "I sell my paintings because I can't keep them all," Sheppard, 51, said.

Louisa Yan, 62, began painting after she was laid off from her job at a bank.

"I like to paint, but I never had the chance. Now that I'm retired, I have a lot of free time so I come here to paint," Yan said. Yan's paintings, mostly landscapes, hang on the walls at the Sanctuary and were also displayed at the arts eXtravaganza.

Both Sheppard and Yan attend the Friday

Yan loves the drop-in program.

arts drop-in program at the Sanctuary. The church offers programs in the visual arts, music, and drama. The talents of the community, which include poetry, music, storytelling, drama, and visual art, are shown off at two arts eXtravaganza evenings throughout the year.

"This evening is about the need to recognize that we work with people whose voices often are not heard," said Lyf Stolte, artist-

Musicians shine during arts night.

in-residence at the Sanctuary, to the crowd. "It's important that we listen to that voice in whatever form is healthiest, whether it be through art or something else."

The Sanctuary church is a blend of a congregation and a mission, where people on the street and church-goers can look at each other as friends and each help the other.

"We don't exist to help people on the street, but to be a community that welcomes the poor, the homeless, and addicts," said Alan Beattie, the managing director at the Sanctuary.

A fight that broke out between two audience members at the arts eXtravaganza illustrated this for Stolte.

"Nobody made a big deal about it. Traci just kept going [with her story]," Stolte said.

Jesus called the sick and the lonely to be a part of his church, Stolte said. They should be welcomed, no matter what their situation. You don't have to be healthy to belong to the Sanctuary.

"If we said that, we would never see the needy people. We deal with [problems] in a way that respects both us and them," said Stolte.

Bethany Van Lingen (bethany.vanlingen@gmail.com) is a first-year Bachelor of Journalism student at Ryerson University in Toronto. She is also a member of Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Cambridge, Ontario.

The prayer of advent

Dr. Syd Hielema serves as chaplain and Associate Professor of Religion at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

Traditional Latvian Nativity

The earliest documented use of a tree as part of a Christmas celebration was in Latvia in 1510, according to German sources. Thus 2010 marks the 500th anniversary of what Latvians call the first Christmas tree, seen here in this Traditional Latvian Nativity. The oil painting on linen flax fabric is by Latvian artist Ingmara Zalite (2009) from Studio Linen Fantasies, Riga Latvia, EU (used with permission). More of Ingmara's paintings may be viewed at www.LinenPaintings.com.

Christian business leaders form Guelph chapter

The Canadian Christian Business Federation (CCBF) has come to Guelph. More than 20 men and women from the Guelph business community met over breakfast on Nov. 20 to launch the formation of the Guelph chapter, creating the ninth chapter in southern Ontario. As CCBF executive director Keith Knight says, "when you are a Christian involved in a business, you're involved in ministry."

The Canadian Christian Business Federation creates chapters which function as support groups for those in business. Some members choose to meet in monthly breakfast meetings. Others choose to support the ministry through their annual membership fee without taking part in the breakfasts. They simply believe in the ministry.

Knight says that it's tough being a Christian in business today. "There are incredible demands and expectations to generate profit . . . whatever the cost. There are pressures to compromise on ethics, and to treat employees as chattel. Those monthly breakfast meetings provide devotional material geared specifically to dealing with these kinds of issues."

The CCBF has more than 800 members and adherents, mainly in Ontario. Its membership involves everyone from CEOs of multinational corporations to independent tradespeople; from chiropractors and dentists to engineers and lawyers.

Even though the organization is 23 years old, Knight says that interest across the country has soared in recent months. "A chiropractor in Winnipeg has asked for permission to form a chapter there. There are similar requests in Edmonton and Calgary. A Chatham chapter is being launched in January to meet a demand from local Christian business leaders."

"There is a strong need for Christians to be able to relate their faith to the workplace. The CCBF, especially through the local chapters, provides that kind of support system. This need was quite evident at the launch of the Guelph chapter when a young man, who arrived late, indicated at the conclusion of the meeting that he owned a business, recently became a Christian and that he was trying to find a mentor who could help him understand what it means to practice his faith through his business." The CCBF is in the process of developing The Mentor Network.

Knight says he also intends to expand its current internship program where a student enrolled in a business program at a Christian college or university is placed within a Christian business setting. "I have already received requests from The King's College in Edmonton and also from a newly formed body called Christian Higher Education Canada to develop an internship program across the country, linking Christian colleges with the local Christian business community."

Keith Knight can be reached at ccbfed@gmail.com or through the website, www.ccbf.org.

Column

And you will find him in a blue box

"A modern nativity" by Ken O'Brien imagines the birth of Jesus in contemporary Dublin.

I have never met a shepherd. I've never been to the "swaddling cloths" section of Zeller's. I have never seen a manger – though I fed a lot of hay to cows, growing up. And though I'm sure Quirinius, the governor of Syria, was a big deal back in his day, I know nothing about him.

I'll bet you don't, either.

The thing is, 2000 years ago, swaddling cloths and mangers were commonplace, everyday items. Today, they sound exotic. Consider the shepherds, too. In Jesus' time they were the butt of jokes. Social outcasts. And yet today, when our kids put on Christmas pageants, the shepherds are always immaculately dressed in white bathrobes.

And that's the problem with the Christmas story, as told in the Gospel of Luke. It's so full of things that are alien to us, they sound practically majestic. Which is why we miss the point.

Jesus wasn't born into a world that was expecting him. He wasn't born into some historical Hallmark Moment where everyone was dressed in their Sunday best. He was born into a busy, working world. But because his time is so distant from our own, we forget just how amazing it was that the divine should come to a world so mundane.

So imagine the story if Jesus were born now – in an ordinary, work-a-day world? It might go something like this. . . .

* * *

In those days, Stephen Harper decided to conduct a long-form census of all of Canada. That was back in the days when Danny Williams was Premier of Newfoundland.

Everyone had to go back where they were born to do the paperwork. So Joseph drove his minivan from Thunder Bay to Toronto, where his family came from. Mary, his fiancée, was seven months pregnant, but she came along anyway.

When they got to Toronto, all the hotels were booked, because so many people were doing the exact same thing as Joseph. They searched all over until, finally, one hotel manager agreed to rent them some cots in his hotel's boiler room.

The child was born, right there, amid all the noise, next to the brooms and the buckets and the mops. Mary wrapped him up in hotel towels and put him in a recycling bin so he could sleep. It was the best she could do.

A few doors away, a group of computer programmers were pulling an all-nighter, writing code and eating stale pizza. Suddenly, in a bright flash, an angel of the Lord appeared in the middle of their cubicles and said: "Don't be scared. I'm here to tell you about the greatest event in history. Tonight, in Toronto, a child has been born who will be the Saviour of the world. He will bring joy to all people, everywhere. He's Christ, the Lord. And you will find him, sleeping in a recycling bin, in the boiler room of the Holiday Inn."

Suddenly the entire office was filled with angels, praising God and singing.

When the angels left, the programmers jumped up and said: "That's sick! We have got to see this!" And after they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby in the recycling bin, they Tweeted about it, and posted it on Facebook, and told all their friends what they had seen.

But Mary kept all of this to herself, and treasured it.

* * *

When you tell the story like that, it sounds like sacrilege, doesn't it? It takes a sacred moment and makes it seem profane.

But that's the point! That's why the story contains so much detail. Luke didn't want to make Christ's birth feel distant and remote – he wanted it to feel nearby and immediate. He wanted people feel like they could have seen Christ's birth with their very own eyes. That it was the most natural thing in the world.

However, Luke also wanted to show just how extraordinary and supernatural it was.

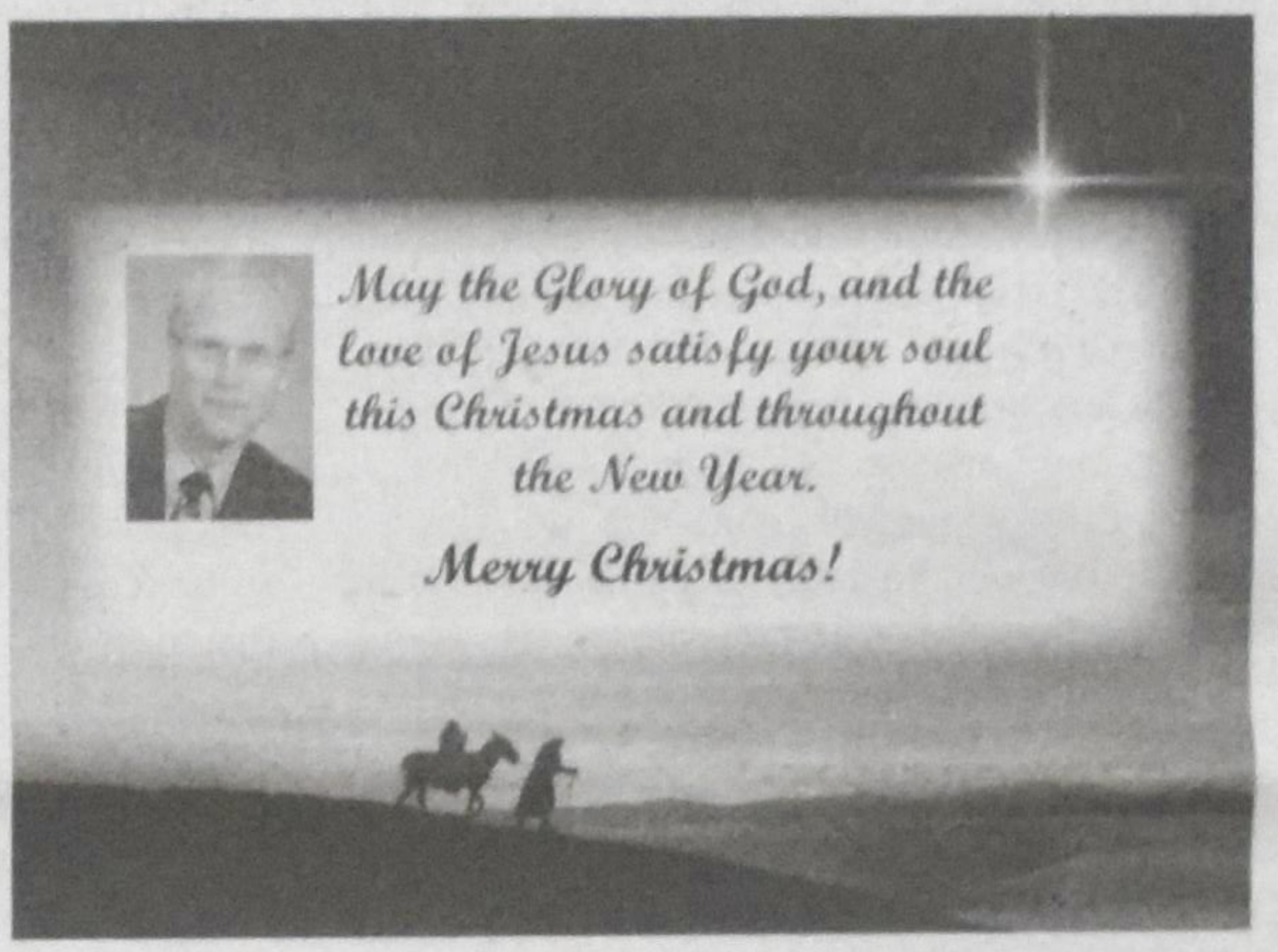
Because who, in their right mind, would believe a bunch of sweaty IT Nerds who said they'd met the Son of God? Who would believe a bunch of pizza-scarfing social outcasts hopped up on Red Bull? Who would believe the saviour of mankind would be born in a Blue Box in the boiler room of a downtown Toronto Holiday Inn?

Imagine THAT on a Hallmark card!

For us, the Christmas story has taken on a sheen and a pageantry all of its own. And yet, believing such a tall tale would have required the people of Luke's time to take an enormous leap of faith. To see past the everyday details of Jesus' birth and beyond, into God's plan for his people.

Today, it still does.

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) is a member of Rehoboth CRC in Bowmanville, Ontario.



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Editorials

The lies behind attempts to legalize euthanasia

Michael Coren

Pride hides beneath most that is wrong, from the thinnest of failings to the fattest of crimes: the pride that we, rather than God, are in control and that our bodies are ours to do with what we want. Sometimes this attitude is invincibly malicious, sometimes understandable. When it comes to the subject of euthanasia we see both aspects. For those promoting the cult of death such pride is horror, pure and simple. For those who are suffering, far more complex and delicate.

We need, however, to take back the argument and challenge some of the accepted wisdom surrounding euthanasia. Proponents of assisted suicide claim that the dying always suffer, that disability is a curse, that we have the right and wisdom to make our own decisions about when to die and that so-called mercy killing is administered only after layers of consideration. These simply aren't true. Nobody approaching death should experience pain and nobody need do so. All physical pain can be controlled, but insufficient time and money is spent training doctors and nurses to deal with end-of-life issues. If we genuinely valued life, we would spend money on hospices and medication rather than abortion clinics and missiles.

Furthermore, the notion that a person who feels they want to die can make an objective, informed decision about whether to live or die is, frankly, absurd. In reality they are the least qualified people because they are terrified and agonized. Anyone who has experienced any sort of pain or nausea knows that it is difficult to see beyond the immediate need to be free of distress. The answer is not to help someone die, but help them to live.

All in God's image

Nor can elderly and ill people, even when not in pain, make truly independent decisions. The media tells them that only the young and sexy matter; their families often put them in institutions and then wonder why they feel rejected, and a culture that once revered the aged as temples of wisdom now looks on them as slums of irrelevance.

It is no accident that the most intimidated by, and active against, euthanasia are the disabled. While we boast equality in Canada today, we violently discriminate against disability at the earliest opportunity by aborting babies who are considered imperfect. Imagine how a Downs person feels knowing that many desire a future society where they do not exist. It's worth remembering that when, in 1993, Robert Latimer killed his little girl Tracy, he claimed he was putting her out of her misery when, of course, he was putting her out of his. But even the phrase likens this unique human, made in the image of God, to an animal. The difference is that pigs, cows and baby seals attract celebrity support whereas children with cerebral palsy do not.

Avenue of grace

Equally pernicious, and more subtle, is the idea that euthanasia would be rare and only at the request of a dying person. The truth is that there are myriad cases of abuse of what is already a murderous procedure. In most of the regions where such killing is legal, the boards of inquiry are composed of the very people who introduced the policies in the first place, which explains why there have been so few prosecutions in cases of obvious crime.

One particularly obnoxious episode involved a terminally ill but comfortable and well-adjusted woman in Holland who had visited her doctor in hospital for a check-up. He advised her to take advantage of the visit and stay overnight for some well-deserved respite. When the doctor did his rounds the following morning, the woman was dead – given lethal drugs by another medic who had assumed, this being the climate of Dutch healthcare, that the patient was there for termination.

Euthanasia ideologues believe that if a depressed teenager or healthy but troubled young adult wants to die, they should have the right to do so and that the state has a duty to help them. The caricature of the desperate person eager to die and pleading with loved ones to stop the pain and hasten an inevitable death is hardly typical.

God is in everything, and especially in the struggle against pain and suffering. He knows it, feels it, is with us in the battle against it. In our suffering is our glory and his grace. Life is not a sentence but a blessing. Death is guaranteed, but to encourage it is a curse. The debate about euthanasia isn't really about dying at all. It's about the joy of living, and passing, as we were made to do.

Michael Coren is a controversial Christian speaker and author, host of CTS's Michael Coren Show and regular contributor to over a dozen newspapers across Canada. He is passionate about supporting life from conception to natural death.

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Canada

Out of control: the unchallenged authority of 'the pill'

Angela Reitsma Bick

There are two kinds of women in Canada: those currently taking the birth control pill and those who have stopped. This drug is so commonly used that it's taken over the noun "pill," as if there were no others. Any teenage girl who avoids receiving a prescription for a hormone-based contraceptive (acne? irregular period?) will almost certainly try the pill in her twenties. And physicians are quick to point out that the side effects of the old high-dose pill (weight gain, blood clots) have been eradicated.

Well, almost eradicated.

Just about wiped out, anyway.

Very close, except for one pesky detail: the pill is a known carcinogen, as the World Health Organization decided in 2005. Young women who take the pill before having children face a 44 percent increased risk of developing breast cancer, according to a study put out by the Mayo Clinic in 2006. This will not be on a poster in your doctor's office. It is not making many headlines. But as a drug that half the population takes for half their lives – it should be. 2010 is the 50th birthday of the pill that regulates birth, and the loudest voices this year have been a chorus of congratulations.

Only a few dissenters, like Andrea Mrozek of the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, break through the noise to remind us that "[t]he pill is not Tylenol or cough medicine. Certainly it's widely used. However, forever downplayed are the nasty and known side-effects" (*Ottawa Citizen,* Sept. 2010).

Current contraceptive trends such as the pill prop up a culture that prefers individual freedom over God's desire for long-term relationships and families. Promotion for the pill assumes it's a lifestyle choice: "Express yourself, try Alesse." A new brand called YAZ promises to banish menstrual moodiness with "We're not gonna take it." When these ads are everywhere (even inside bathroom door stalls), where can we have a conversation challenging the pill's authority?

Reproductive (in)equality

In the 1960s, first-wave feminists embraced the pill as their ticket out of the kitchen. Most of the ensuing debate focused on whether or not the pill promoted promiscuity; people worried more about its side effects on morals than health. Journalist Barbara Seaman was one of the first people to question the safety of taking synthetic hormones in *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill* (1969). But for fifty years, we've heard far more about the pros of pill use than the cons – for three reasons. First, convenience trumps caution; hormone-based contraceptives are easier than other methods to use. Second, an old-fashioned feminism still sees any criticism of the pill as an attack on women's rights. Finally, and most influential, the pill is a commercially important product. Pharmaceutical companies make $7 billion a year on the pill, so why promote lifestyle alternatives or highlight new health-care concerns?

Instead, there's a push in the U.S. to make the pill available without a prescription. "After fifty years of data about how safe this drug is," Dr. Daniel Grossman of Ibis Reproductive Health in San Francisco has said, "it's crazy that we still have these barriers to gaining access." I disagree. After fifty years of data about how risky this drug is, it's crazy that we still have quotes like this, pushing to make the pill even more widely used.

Birth cajole pill

A recent issue of *Utne* magazine drew attention to studies in male contraceptive options done in India. The most interesting methods are non-hormonal, such as using heat and ultrasound to stimulate infertility for up to six months. The effects have proven reversible and harmless over 25 years of experiments on men. "What's clearer than ever," writes Helen Cordes in *Herizons* magazine, "is that male reproductive processes are just as easy to manipulate as – and sometimes easier than – women's." No correlating research has been done in North America, because "pharmaceutical giants would rather keep pouring cash into the proven . . . female contraceptive market" (21). Another reason to stop singing in the pill's self-congratulatory choir: in order to urge physicians and scientists to study male contraceptive options.

The U.S. National Cancer Institute is cautious about publicizing any known links to cancer. Nevertheless, their website says studies have shown that sustained pill use increases the risk of breast, cervical and liver cancer. It also seems to decrease the risk of ovarian cancer – a much more familiar link, part of the "why the pill is wonderful" refrain. *Newsweek* claims the pill has done "more good for people than any other invention of the 20th century" (May 2010); it's time to question that claim. Not enough of us consider what kind of lifestyle the drug companies are selling when they market the pill. Let's find out more about how years of ingesting synthetic hormones changes a woman's body. Let's start a new conversation, one that temporarily tunes out pro-pill propaganda. In fact, maybe it's time to start promoting another version of "We're not gonna take it!"

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of CC. She lives in Barrie.

Letters

In defense of Republicans

In his column of October 25, Mr. Bert Hielema slandered a significant number of his fellow believers who happen to be members of the Republican Party in the United States. In the process, he was factually inaccurate by stating, "Its platform proclaims that, because we have god-given rights, we are free to pollute." It says no such thing. He does quote from a Republican platform, but it's the platform of the Iowa Republican party, not the Republican National Committee. There is a difference. He is apparently confused about the difference between the State and National Parties because he goes on to write in the same paragraph of the horror of the Republicans gaining power in Congress in the November elections. He analogizes this to "openly approving vandalism on the Mona Lisa or Rembrandt's 'Nacht Wacht,'" – as if Republicans were waiting with baited breath to rape and plunder the land on November third.

To get the facts straight, the Republican platform actually says: "The same human economic activity that has brought freedom and opportunity to billions has also increased the amount of carbon in the atmosphere." Here it acknowledges a contribution by human beings to atmospheric carbon. Regarding the proposed solutions, "As part of a global climate change strategy, Republicans support technology-driven, market-based solutions that will decrease emissions, reduce excess greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, increase energy efficiency, mitigate the impact of climate change where it occurs, and maximize any ancillary benefits climate change might offer for the economy." Doing no harm. "Republicans caution against the doomsday climate change scenarios peddled by the aficionados of centralized command-and-control government. We can – and should – address the risk of climate change based on sound science without succumbing to the no-growth radicalism that treats climate questions as dogma rather than as situations to be managed responsibly" (35-36). This is hardly an anti-environmental platform that encourages pollution. The platform is available for all to read at *www.gop.com/index.php/page_content/issues.*

This is a Christian publication. Mr. Hielema is writing as a Christian, as am I. Biblical standards should be applied to our writing, so I must write with humility since I too may (and my theology informs me that I do) err in my writing and stand in need of grace in regard to my errors. It is with this recognition of my own frailty that I call on Mr. Hielema to consider more carefully the admonitions in Scripture. "Let all . . . slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31 ESV). "But now you must put them all away: . . . slander, and obscene talk from your mouth" (Colossians 3:8 ESV). To say that Republicans believe that because they have god-given rights they are free to pollute is slanderous and false.

Charles L Stanley
Escondido, California

Trusting in Scripture's accuracy

Allow me to say a few words concerning the writings of Bert den Boggende about the role of women in the early church (Oct. 25). I fully agree that the treatment of women by our Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning of the restoration of women in society, and in the church. And, as den Boggende also states, this rightful place was opposed by the leadership of the church in later years, for different reasons.

However, I disagree with his conclusion regarding Mary, the mother of Jesus, when he tells us what she has stated in the song of Mary: "[Luke] has Mary exclaim powerful words against the mighty." In other words, den Boggende thinks that Luke the Gospel writer may have put these words into Mary's mouth, something "most ancients historians, such as Thucydides and Livy did." At that time no one thought this to be dishonest, as long as it was compatible with the person. Den Boggende backs up his understanding of the passage by a statement of Cicero, which goes as follows, "We concede to rhetoricians the privilege of **distorting** history to produce a more effective narrative" [emphasis mine]. Earlier in his article, den Boggende states that Mary's statement was highly unusual for the ancient world, certainly for someone of such low status.

The interpretation den Boggende has given us surely can be applied to the secular history, but we are not dealing with secular history here; this is Scripture, the Holy Writ. What Mary said was prophecy and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

If we apply our human logic to all the statements made by people in the Bible, who were pivotal in the coming of the Kingdom, and surely Mary was, we end up in dangerous waters. For instance, did Luke put words in the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ? If we go that way in our exegesis, we will ultimately lose all solid ground from under our feet.

William van Oene
St. Thomas, Ontario

CC asked, "How would you like to die? What makes a good death?"

Something, someone else

Someday my grandfather will be as dead
as the Latin language.
But his roots will continue, onward, upward,
sideways and backways
into the strangest places of our family tree:
Someone else will eat a chocolate-covered cherry
for his birthday and offer
the rest of the box
to the other sixty attendees.
Someone else will walk vigorously to and from
everywhere.
Someone else will slick back his glossy hair
with pomade every single morning.
Someone else will sing noisily, annoyingly, hilariously
into late evenings and
early mornings
and feel like the whole world should be singing along.
Someone else will pay attention
where no one else
has.
Someone else will proclaim the name of Jesus with every beat
of his life's drum, even if it's a little broken – hitting it harder
so it still sounds out.
You are something else.

Marissa Carpenter

Marissa (De Haan) Carpenter graduated from Trinity Christian College with a B.A. in English and currently lives in Blue Island, Illinois ("Chicago") with her husband, Aaron and her kitten, Daisycutter.

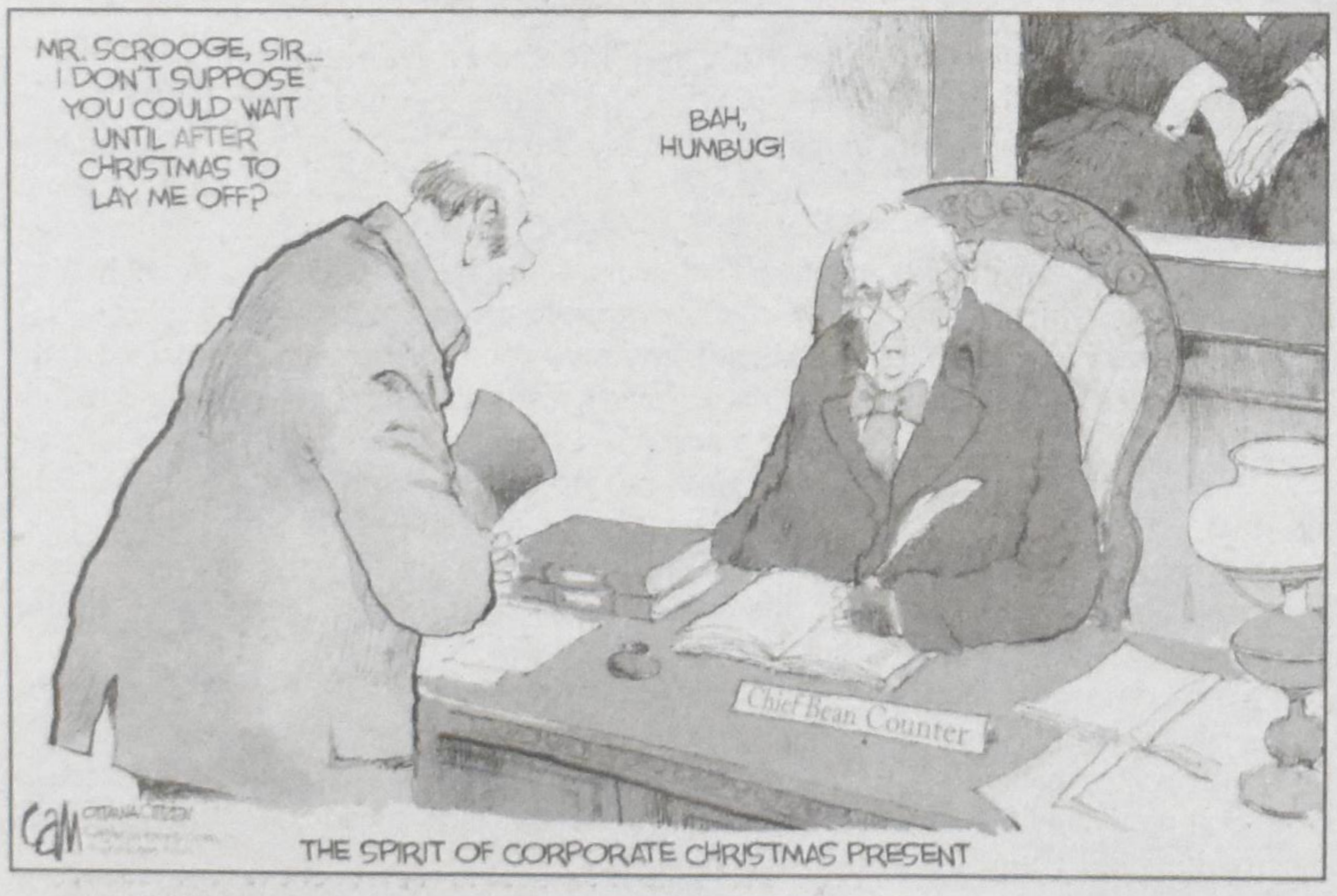
Going against a culture that denies death

I read Nick Loenen's article (*How would you like to die?* Oct. 25) with great interest. We do not talk too much about death and dying today, but I was comforted by the article and could say a resounding "Amen!" I think as Christians we need to reclaim responsibility and ownership for our living and our dying.

Loenen describes what it was like for my dad: "surrounded by family, friends and pastors who care. To have the time to prepare, to receive God's grace to let go, and to hear the music of heaven while on earth."

I feel that I was able to be present to dad and mom and help dad journey well in his last days. My dad came home from hospital on May 6th and went HOME to be with the Lord on May 12 of this year. Dad had a good death because he was at peace. Like Loenen's father, as my dad "let go of earth he saw heaven. As he was dying he celebrated life."

Elna Siebring
Halifax, N.S.



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News

Egypt: Muslim mob torches homes of Coptic Christians

CAIRO, Egypt (ChristianPost/Marian Van Til) – Coptic Christians in the Upper Egyptian village of el-Nowahed, Abu-Tesht, in Qena Province, were victims of an attack by a Muslim mob of nearly 1,000 people on November 15. The attack started at 10 p.m. and lasted until the early hours of the next morning when a curfew was finally imposed.

According to witnesses, the large mob from el-Nowahed and surrounding villages surrounded Coptic homes crying out, "Allah is the greatest" and other Islamic Jihadist slogans. They detonated butane gas cylinders and threw fireballs. According to Ra'fat Samir, who heads the Luxor branch of the Egyptian Union for Human Rights, 22 Christian-owned homes were broken into, plundered and burned, as were two commercial shops and a bakery. Livestock were also killed. Amazingly, there were no reported human casualties.

The rampage came in the wake of a story that three days earlier a 19-year-old Copt, Hossam Noel Attallah, was seen with a 17-year-old Muslim girl, Rasha Mohamed Hussein, a relative of the village mayor. According to Anba Kyrillos, Bishop of the Diocese of Nag Hamadi, some witnesses saw the teenage couple walking together towards the graveyards, after which it was rumored in the village that he raped her. That, despite the fact that a Muslim woman "confirmed that Hossam did nothing wrong to the girl," said the bishop.

A police report was issued and both were brought before the public prosecutor, after which the young man was detained by State Security. An eyewitness to the violence, who was himself beaten by Muslims, said the mob blocked the fire brigade from reaching the burning homes. He also said he saw security forces go into the houses of Copts and arrest them.

Long history of persecution

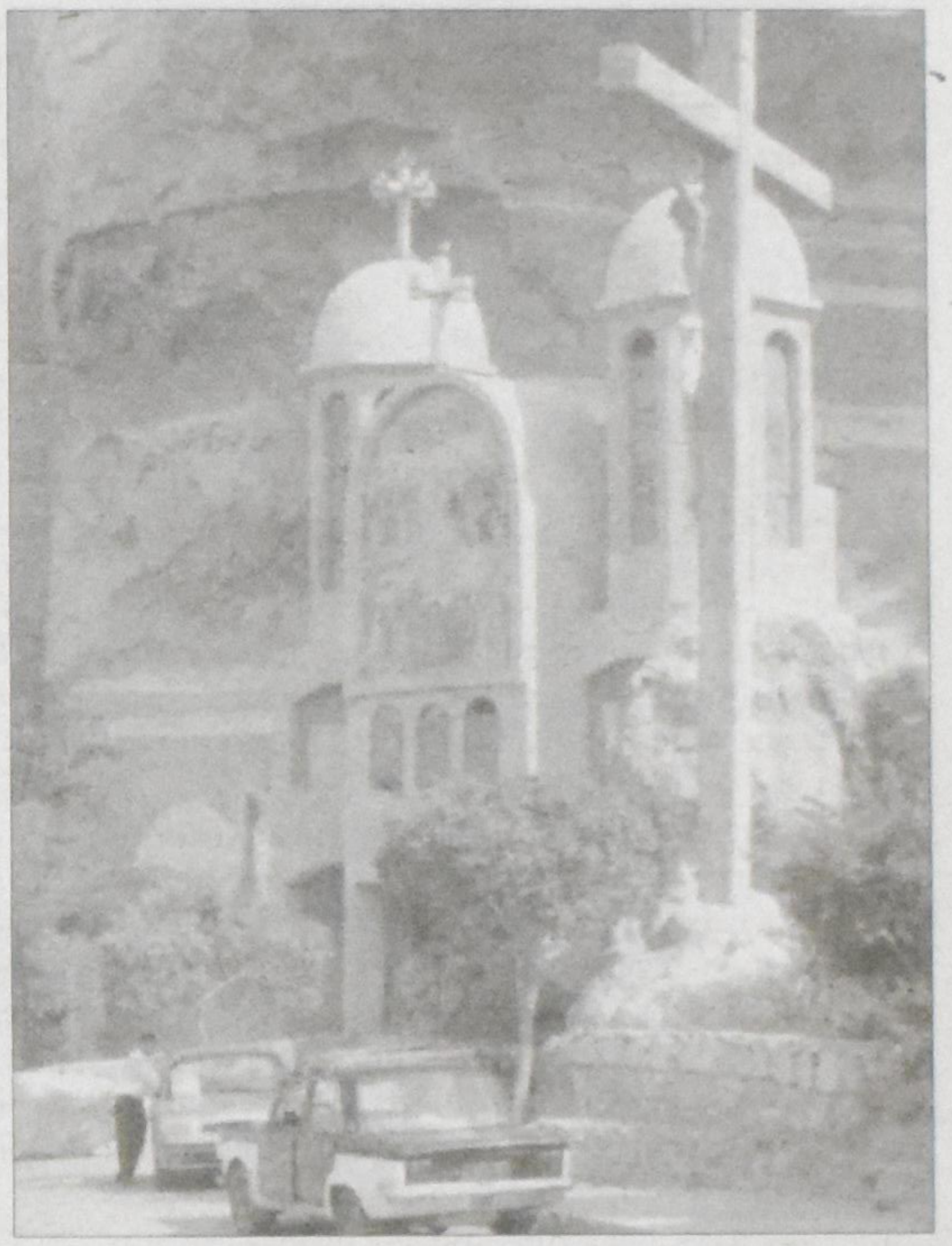
Copts accused the authorities of severe inadequacy, because although being aware of the incident of the Copt and the Muslim girl, they had stationed only three security cars at the entrances of the village. "But when the security officers saw the large mobs entering the village from all sides and attacking it, they fled, leaving it unprotected to operations of terrorism, sabotage, arson and looting of Coptic property," said an onlooker, adding that security forces were guarding only St. George's Church.

Activist Attorney Mamdouh Nakhla of Al-Kalema Human Rights Center condemned the Muslim attack, stressing the collusion of State Security with the offenders by failing to arrest any of the perpetrators (so far) and even chasing the Copts and arresting them "because of their interviews with some Coptic websites in relation to the incident." Nakhla said that his center will send a fact-finding committee to the village. Bishop Kyrillos said that the present estimates of damage to Coptic property is approximately 250,000 Egyptian pounds.

Dr. Naguib Gobrail, President of the Egyptian Union of Human Rights, said "We all reject that Copts would become a 'whipping-boy' where every time an individual Copt is accused of committing some crime, the entire Coptic community should be made to pay the price and be punished by waging attacks on their lives and property." He asked rhetorically if Muslims would accept the same treatment if circumstances were reversed.

Ghobrial said he will file a compensation lawsuit against the Prime Minister, the Interior Minister and the Governor of Qena on behalf of all the Coptic victims of el-Nowahed for moral and material damage. "Has the victim become the perpetrator or are they afraid of the opponents?" he asked.

Modern-day Coptic Christians trace their lineage to the spread of the gospel by the Apostles into Egypt, and specifically by the Apostle Mark, and probably Barnabas. Within 200 years Christianity had become the faith of the majority, despite Egypt then being under Roman rule and Christians being oppressed by the Romans. (The Apostles' Creed was written in Alexandria.) In AD 651 Egypt was one of the countries conquered by Arab Muslims. That began the 1400-year persecution, to the present, of Coptic Christians by Muslims. The name "Coptic" comes from the language spoken in Egypt beginning in the first century after Christ.



A Coptic church (Cairo) with its typical round-topped spires.

Serving unreached places: long-time CRC church planters retire

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – For many years Allen and Lynn Likkel worked in communities all over North America planting churches, nurturing those churches along and developing new church leaders. Although Allen Likkel formally worked for Christian Reformed Home Missions (CRHM) during this period, his wife Lynn was always by his side, helping to build leaders and new congregations. "We've been a team," says Allen Likkel. "We're both humbled by the gifts we have seen in the people around us." Adds Lynn, "It has been such a privilege to see the lives of people transformed."

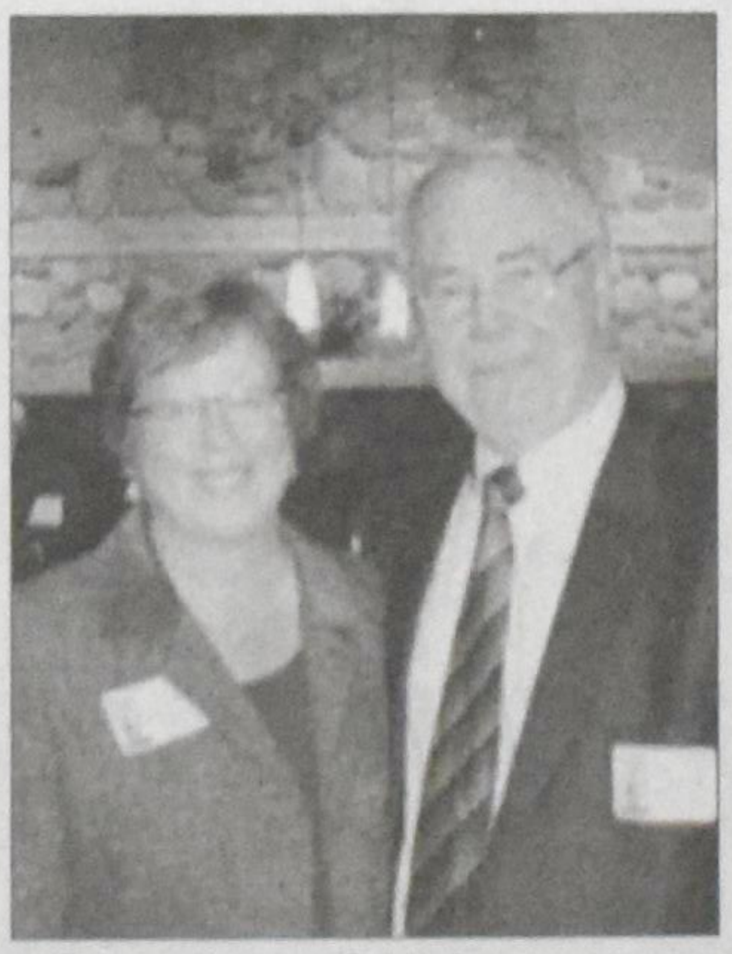
At the end of November Allen Likkel retired, and thus, so did Lynn. During Allen's career the Likkels have seen the Christian Reformed Church in North America substantially change its vision and approach, from supporting mostly mainstream congregations to reaching out to create new churches, often in hard-to-reach, ethnically diverse communities.

11 years in B.C.

A church planter on Vancouver Island for 11 years, Likkel has had a passion for bringing the gospel to people in settings in which the CRC has had little presence. Christ Community, the church he and Lynn started in Nanaimo, B.C., today has 430 members.

Given his success in British Columbia, CRHM offered him a position in 1991, which he took. "Home Missions was ramping up church planting at that time. There was a growing vision for North America as a harvest field," Allen says.

His new job was to recruit, train and coach new church planters and see them through the conception and birth of a new church. "All along my driving passion was to build capacity for missions and to help contextualize leaders so that they could be prepared to work in the area in which they went to start a church," he explains. "It was important that they knew that mission opportunities are so uniquely different from one place to another."



Allen and Lynn Likkel

Allen and Lynn also ran a program that they took all over North America, spending four days assessing couples to see if they had what it takes to be church planters.

Even though there were couples they turned down to be church planters, many of these couples became friends with the Likkels. Couples who did go on to start new church became friends as well, and the Likkels loved watching those new churches thrive.

Working themselves out of jobs

Over time, the Likkels essentially worked themselves out of a job. The church planters started churches and then, as they grew, trained new church planters to start a church. "Home Missions did it as an agency. We oversaw the church planting process, but then church planting became owned by the churches. The idea is that churches plant churches."

From there, Allen Likkel took over as director of ministry teams for CRHM, supervising, training and connecting leaders in various areas. He served as a resource person, helping the regional teams learn how to best encourage and support the churches in their areas.

Once again, he more or less worked himself out of a job, since the regional leaders have started to develop mission "clusters" of churches that gather for support and to exchange ideas. Basically, the clusters work together to have an impact on a city. "The clusters are a mostly spontaneous, spirit-inspired support system. We've been able to walk alongside them and help them in the process of spiritual discernment," says Allen.

Smooth move toward retirement

Three years ago, Likkel met with a few fellow pastors and mentors to sort through if he should retire and then how he ought to go about it. As a result, it has been a smooth, transparent process that, he said, allows him to leave feeling good and believing, at the age of 66, that it is the right time.

"We've both turned a corner," says Lynn Likkel of herself and Allen. Lynn was one of the first women ordained in the CRC; she currently works as a pastor/chaplain and will be seeking a new position after Allen officially retires and they move to Washington State, their home area. "We're suddenly seeing the next chapter of our lives as a new vision."

They are open to God's calling for opportunities that, both say, they suspect will be in the areas of church planting and church leadership training.

The Likkels have four children, all involved in some form of ministry. One of their sons started what is now a successful CRC congregation in Seattle, Washington. That's another reason Allen and Lynn plan to spend their retirement back in Washington.

News

Ontario: MP asks, 'Should religion and politics mix?'

Marian Van Til

SCARBOROUGH, Ontario – In a recent opinion piece in the Christian press the Hon. John McKay, Liberal Member of Parliament for Scarborough-Guildwood, asks, "Should religion and politics mix?"

In answering that question in his article, which appears on the <www.christianity.ca> website but was originally written for the *Anglican Journal*, McKay makes assertions about what he sees as the "deeper cause of civic disengagement and voter frustration" among Canadians.

First he observes, "If we think of the places in society where people from different backgrounds and varied neighbourhoods congregate and share social experiences and exchange dialogue, it is plain that schools, places of work and places of worship are the primary hubs of civic interaction.

"As far as the first two are concerned, in the former people are only beginning to become politically conscious and in the second, politics is a subject one is usually prudent to avoid. That leaves places of worship as the only other consistent social hub in which large numbers people of varied perspective and experience associate. Indeed, what better place to discuss high and noble abstract subjects like right, morality and justice than in a place literally built for such contemplation?"

McKay then cites examples of famous Christians who essentially began their social justice campaigns in church: William Wilberforce and the slavery abolition movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement, Tommy Douglas (whom, McKay notes, was a Baptist minister) and Canada's universal public healthcare.

McKay wonders "aloud" to his readers whether the secularization of society and the marginalization of public faith-based political involvement have made voters more disenchanted with our democratic system. He thinks that has happened specifically because "we have removed

from our politics the primary place of civic engagement." Then he asks, "Given the above examples, are we a less progressive nation as a result?"

He notes that "voter decline" has been "a steady phenomenon for decades." He thinks it is "intuitively reasonable" to suggest that this decline "coincides with the increasing marginalization of churches from our public lives." He points out that, conversely, Canadians who are still churchgoers vote in higher numbers than do the rest of the population.

He concludes, "Faith can be the impetus which moves grand, national debates and changes minds. But this cannot happen unless we allow for that voice in our public realm . . . . If we are to reverse the trends of voter decline and disenfranchisement then let's have a serious public discussion about the important role faith plays in our democracy and in our lives as citizens."

Anglicanism: Controversial 'gay' bishop to resign

CONCORD, N.H. (CNA) – Citing the toll that worldwide publicity has taken on his "marriage" and on New Hampshire Episcopalians, Gene Robinson – the first openly homosexual man to become a bishop of the Episcopal Church – announced on Nov. 6 that he resigns from his diocese, a process that will take two years.

In 2003, Robinson, now 63, received approval from the Episcopal Church's General Convention to become a bishop after church members and clergy of the New Hampshire diocese selected him for the position. His appointment sparked outrage among both traditional Anglicans and other biblical Christians alike, who considered it an affront to biblical standards of sexual conduct on the part of the Episcopal Church.

Rejecting a 'judgmental God'

The controversial bishop has become one of the global Anglican communion's most prominent American representatives, a fact he noted in the letter, stating that he "(gets) to talk to probably more unchurched people than any other Bishop in The Episcopal Church," telling them "a different story" that rejects the idea of "a judgmental God." He sees his position as "evangelism ..., pure and simple."

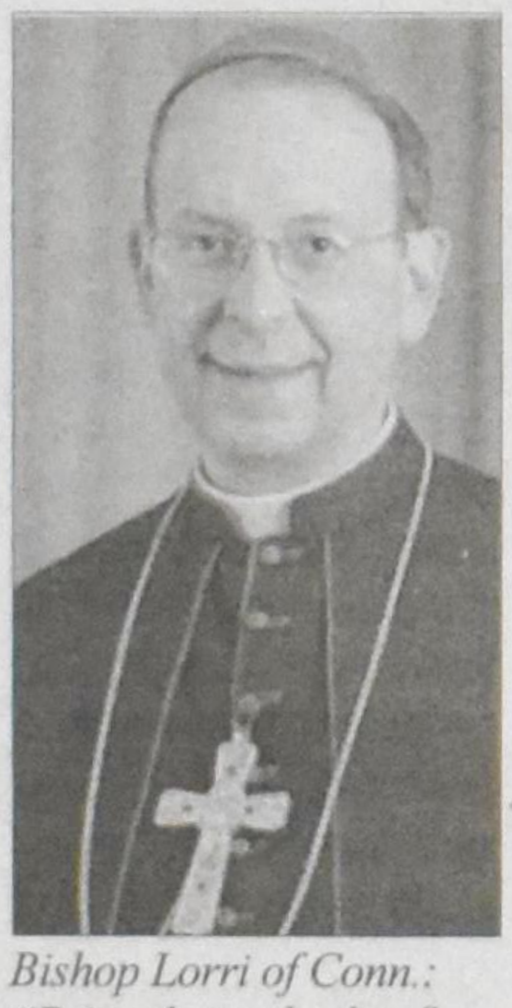
Some American and Canadian opponents formed a separate Anglican Church in North America in 2009. Other traditional Anglicans have opted to enter full communion with the Catholic Church, through provisions outlined by Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Constitution "Anglicanorum Coetibus" issued that same year.

Two days after Robinson announced his plans to retire, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales announced that five Anglican bishops would be departing the Church of England to seek full communion with the Catholic Church through the structures Pope Benedict has established.

Robinson sees himself as a trailblazer. Mary Glasspool, an open lesbian, recently became a bishop of the Episcopal Church's Los Angeles diocese.

U.S.: State government tries to redefine religious freedom, bishop warns

BRIDGEPORT, Connecticut (CNA) – A Roman Catholic bishop in the northeastern U.S. has warned the faithful of his diocese that their fight for religious freedom has just begun, despite the defeat of a law that would have stripped authority from Catholic clergy.



Bishop Lorri of Conn.: "Bring the truths that flow from faith into public life."

In an autumn pastoral letter, Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., warned that "authentic religious freedom" is coming under fire from legislators, judges and other officials. He called attention to a "growing tendency in our state to view religious liberty as a grant to citizens by civil authorities," rather than a God-given right that the state should acknowledge and protect.

Alongside this misconception there is a tendency to view religion as an exclusively private matter that must be prevented from influencing society, he said. Some advocates of this view reinterpret the U.S. Constitution's First Amend-ment as guaranteeing "freedom *from* religion," not "*of* religion," effectively banishing faith from public life.

Bishop Lori alluded to some government officials' refer-ences only to a narrow "freedom of *worship*" rather than the "free exercise of religion" that the U.S. Constitution guarantees. That would curtail the freedom of all Christians; but there are also threats specifically to the Catholic Church in Connecticut, including last year's widely criticized State Bill 1098. The measure's stated purpose was "to revise the corporate governance provisions applicable to the Roman Catholic Church." It would have effectively barred bishops and clergy from any direct involvement in the administration of parishes.

S.B. 1098 limited the concept of religious freedom by proposing to allow bishops and pastors to control "matters pertaining exclusively to religious tenets and practices" while denying them administrative authority in their parishes.

The bill's sponsors withdrew their proposal after it triggered a statewide uproar and attracted national attention in March 2009. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' general counsel Anthony Picarello said the bill was "not even close to constitutional," and compared it to notorious anti-Catholic laws of the 19th century.

Curtailing faith in one area after another

While the Connecticut legislature didn't pass that bill, it did pass legislation forcing Catholic hospitals to assist in possible chemical abortions after cases of rape. In his pastoral letter, Bishop Lori revisited the 2007 controversy over the "Plan B law," which he said was "aimed at Catholic hospitals." That law forbids medical professionals from administering an ovulation test to determine whether a rape victim's use of emergency contraception might cause an abortion. Only by examining both a pregnancy test and an ovulation test can physicians know whether the drug endangers a human life.

The bishop also called attention to his state's redefinition of marriage as any union of two consenting adults. That redefinition occurred, in his words, "not because [Connecticut] citizens voted for it, but rather because four justices of the [state] Supreme Court decided that traditional marriage between a man and a woman has 'no rational basis.'" The decision, he remarked, establishes in law the unreasonable principle that marriage has nothing to do with either procreation or the raising of children.

In regard to Catholic schools, Bishop Lori lamented that the state of Connecticut fails to provide many basic forms of support to Catholic schools that the U.S. Supreme Court has found to be constitutional. As an example he cited the fact that the state also does not allow education majors, even those at Catholic universities, to work toward their teacher certification by student-teaching in any private school.

In response to these challenges, the Bishop of Bridgeport urged Christians to inform themselves about the issues at stake and defend religious freedom on all possible fronts – from water-cooler conversations and family gatherings to the White House and the Supreme Court. He recommended prayer for public officials, vigilant political participation through voting, and contact with one's government representatives. He urged Catholics to follow the work of local conferences – such as the Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference – that speak for the bishops on matters of public policy.

"It is also important," the bishop urged, "that good men and women – with skills, virtues, and values – run for public office." While noting that the calling to political life was a difficult one, he also spoke of the possibility for candidates with integrity "to recoup the moral consensus" that America's founding fathers considered central to democracy. "A great need exists, for those who understand how to bring the truths, virtues and values that flow from faith . . . into public life," he observed.

News

Abolishing the oldest oppression

Part II of a series on human trafficking in Canada

Julia Beazley

OTTAWA, Ont. – Prostitution itself is not, and has never been, illegal in Canada. But the existing *Criminal Code* provisions render essentially all activities around it illegal, including three provisions struck down by Justice Susan Himel of the Ontario Superior Court on September 28: keeping a common bawdy house, living off the avails of prostitution, and communicating for the purpose of prostitution.

In 131 pages of written decision, Justice Himel ruled that three key elements of Canada's prostitution laws were unconstitutional. The heart of the decision, as she writes, is that our existing laws "force prostitutes to choose between their freedom and their right to security," as guaranteed under the Charter.

Prostitution is not a "choice."

The Ontario challenge was brought by three women – a dominatrix, and two prostitutes – whose lawyers argued that Canada's prostitution laws constitute a violation of Charter rights, in particular infringing on the women's right to practice their trade in safety. A similar challenge was recently given the green light in the province of British Columbia, and challenges in other provinces may not be far behind.

The Canadian government has always discouraged prostitution, enforcing laws rooted in the historic and current understanding that it is an exploitative practice which harms its participants and is detrimental to Canadian society. However, the current laws are imperfect and arguably fail both to protect prostitutes from harm and to discourage prostitution.

Now is an opportune moment to re-examine our existing laws, which have been found to be flawed by a first court. It is a moment for Parliament to consider whether it might chart a better, more just way forward. It is also a moment for us, together as Canadians, to take a closer – perhaps a more honest – look at what is commonly and glibly referred to as the world's "oldest profession."

Exposing the myths

Large segments of Canadian society seem to have fallen victim to a live and let live attitude towards prostitution. Many take the view that as long as it isn't happening in my back – or front – yard, then what goes on between two consenting adults isn't really any of my business.

But there are a growing number of voices echoing a very different message, voices of women who call themselves "survivors" of prostitution. These women speak of the not-so-glamorous, not-so-consensual realities of prostitution, encouraging us to see it and call it what it is: a form of violent exploitation of women.

UBC Prof Perrin raises awareness on this issue.

UBC Law Professor and recognized human trafficking expert Benjamin Perrin said it well when he noted that prostitution is not the world's oldest profession, rather, it is the world's oldest *oppression*.

Can the exchange that happens be rightly considered consensual? I would argue that as soon as money is put on the table and one person pays for the use of another's body for sexual purposes, the whole notion of consent becomes irrelevant.

Prostituting oneself is rarely a "lifestyle choice." The vast majority of women in the sex trade are not prostituting themselves because it seemed the best of a range of possible life-giving and self-fulfilling options before them. Most were trafficked in or ensnared against their will by pimps, trapped by economic circumstance and isolation and forced to sell their bodies for a cruel survival. It is degrading, dehumanizing and demeaning. And it is dangerous. What's more, studies have consistently shown that well over 90 percent of women in prostitution want out.

And is there such thing as "safe" prostitution? The lawyer for the Ontario women argued that our prostitution laws put women in danger, even going so far as to suggest that had the existing laws not been in effect, the women murdered by Robert Pickton might have been spared.

In contrast, the brave voices of formerly prostituted women are saying, in near unison, that there is simply no such thing as safe prostitution. Whether it takes place behind home doors, hotel, brothel or car doors, prostitution is unsafe, and by its very nature an act of violence against women.

It's not the laws that put women in danger. It's the violent johns, pimps and traffickers. It's the poverty of relationships and resources, exploitation and deception, homelessness and addiction that drive them into the desperation of the world's oldest oppression.

And what about the undeniable links between prostitution and human trafficking? Canada has been exposed as a destination country for human traffickers, largely trafficking for the purpose of prostitution. If the sex trade is allowed to flourish, the demand for women's bodies will skyrocket. It has been demonstrated in countries where prostitution has been legalized that when legalization occurs, there are corresponding spikes in human trafficking rates in order to meet the demand. If Justice Himel's ruling withstands judicial appeal, trafficking into Canada, within neighbourhoods, cities and across provincial lines will certainly increase.

Careful aim

Is there a just way forward? Is there a way to recognize prostitution for what it is and get it off the streets without simply sending it behind closed doors? Yes. Ten years ago, Sweden – a nation that places great value on personal freedoms and equality between the genders – recognized that the act of prostitution contravened both those values, and is only and ever a form of exploitation and violence against women. It is neither a safe or legal form of work, so instead of attempting to legalize or regulate it, the Swedes took measures directed toward the abolition of prostitution. The Swedish law recognizes that the sex trade and human trafficking are intrinsically linked, with organized crime and sex trafficking rings established to feed the demand.

The government accepted that the sex trade operates according to basic market principles of supply and demand, and that to abolish it you must eliminate the demand. So the Swedish legislation, now commonly referred to as the "Nordic model," put in place a legal framework that decriminalized the prostituted women and imposed harsh penalties on the johns, pimps and traffickers.

Why worry about what happens between consenting adults?

They also enacted strong measures to help women exit prostitution. This was accompanied by a public education campaign, to help reshape the way society in general understood and viewed the sex trade. And it has worked.

More than ten years later, the results of an independent inquiry established to study the effects the law has had on rates of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes found that this approach has been highly effective on a number of fronts.

Shortly after its introduction, rates of street prostitution were reduced by half, and have not shown any bounce-back. Before the ban was put in place, rates of street prostitution in the capital cities of Norway, Denmark and Sweden were comparable. But while rates in Sweden decreased by half, rates in the other countries, which chose instead to decriminalize, showed dramatic increases over the ten year period. Crediting this decrease to the change in law is supported by the dramatic reduction in street prostitution already evidenced in Norway following a similar legislative approach in 2009.

Also significant is the reduced establishment and operation of organized crime and human trafficking for sexual purposes in Sweden since the law was implemented, results echoed in Norway since their laws were changed.

Importantly, the education component has revealed a change in public attitude, with strong public support for the laws. Children in Sweden grow up learning that it is not okay to purchase sexual services from another person; that men and women are considered equals; that each individual is deserving of respect and personal freedom; and, that the very idea of prostitution denies those fundamentals. This may be the greatest victory of the change, one whose impact has not yet been realized.

It is time that we Canadians also challenge the notion that it's okay for men to purchase women's (or girls', men's or boys') bodies for sex. Prostitution is not a question of choice. It is the absence and removal of choice. Prostitution is not simply a consensual – if distasteful to most – sexual encounter between adults. It is a business transaction, where the woman's body is the commodity to be purchased and used as the customer chooses. It is a transaction that stands in contradiction to equality and to the dignity and respect due each person. It is time for Canadians to call on our government to take the strong and courageous stand that says we will no longer tolerate or support the exploitation of one person for the gratification of another.

Julia Beazley is a Policy Analyst for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. She lives and works in Ottawa.

News

South Sudan might secede to combat slavery

Kariuki Wangai

NAIROBI, Kenya – Perched on the north-eastern part of Africa, Sudan is literally two countries merged into one. The north, boasting of the capital Khartoum and much of the infrastructure, is distinctly Arab-dominated and Muslim, while the dilapidated south is mainly inhabited by Africans who profess to Christianity. For decades there have been deliberate efforts by the Muslim-dominated, northern-based government to annihilate the Christian south and turn Sudan into a Muslim Republic.

The tensions have led to the decades-long war of liberation that Sudan is known for. Atrocities by the country's armed forces and state-sponsored terror gangs have earned the government worldwide condemnation that culminated in the 2008 indictment of President Omar al Bashir by the International Criminal Court for genocide and crimes against humanity.

President Omar al Bashir was indicted in 2008.

Jajaweed militia terrorize the south.

But while the war in the semi-desert south, home to the oil wells that drive the Sudanese economy, makes global headlines, lesser-known has been a trade in human beings, under cover of the conflict, reminiscent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade of the 19th century.

It is now emerging that up to 10,000 black Africans from the south are abducted annually by criminal gangs and government-backed Arab militia and sold into slavery in the Arab north, where they fetch between $10 and $100 each.

Sources at non-governmental organizations such as the US-based Rift Valley Institute intimate that motivation for this atrocity appears to be double-pronged: a desire to terrorize the south and in the process distract rebel forces from attacking government targets and, more poignant, an effort to promote Islam by subjugating Christians, with sources claiming that forced conversion is part of a systematic brainwashing the slaves are taken through. Other atrocities committed against captured slaves, especially female, include gang rapes, sexual slavery and forced marriages.

Khartoum has refused to cede to mounting pressure to stop the crimes, calling the claims of slavery and slave trading – alongside the indictment of President al Bashir – a conspiracy against the Muslim government.

In an attempt to address the situation, non-governmental organizations such as the Swiss-based Christian Solidarity International (CSI) and the American Anti-Slavery Group have in recent years engaged in a redemption scheme where slaves are purchased from their owners for between $50 and $100 and reconnected with their families. So far, up to 40,000 have been redeemed.

Arek Anyiel Deng was seized at the age of 10.

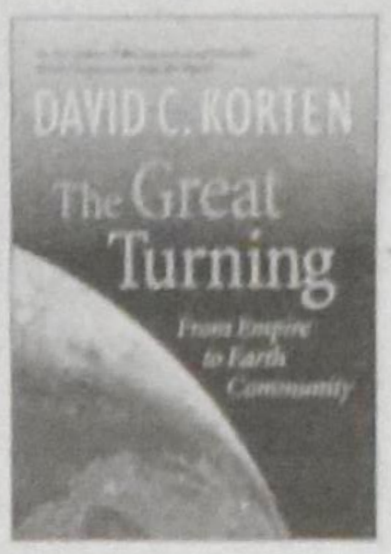
Critics, however, fear that this scheme has only benefitted the slavers and encouraged even more abductions The UN has also added its concern, decreeing that it is ethically wrong to buy human beings.

As part of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement that was signed in Nairobi in 2005 between the south and the National Government, a referendum will be held on January 9, 2011 for Southern Sudan to determine whether they will remain part of Sudan or secede. Proponents of secession argue that the only way to deal with issues such as the trading in slaves is for the south to gain independence and run its own affairs. There is, however, fear that the referendum may re-ignite hostilities that have been on hold since the signing of the Peace Agreement.

Kariuki Wangai (kigoto07@yahoo.com) is a publishing professional, freelance writer and father of three in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Great Turning: from vision to reality

Jenny Prosser



OTTAWA, Ont. – David Korten's latest book, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, is a call for a cultural, political and economic shift towards earth as a community. He defines this as a place of material sufficiency for everyone which honours the generative power of life and love, seeks a balance of feminine and masculine principles, and nurtures a realization of the mature potential of our human nature. Truly, a grand vision. Yet we are left with the same question that follows all such visions: how do we bring it about?

I sat down with David Korten during his recent visit to Ottawa and tried to get answers to this and other questions. We began by looking at the division between public and private knowledge. According to *The Great Turning*, in order to transform society there is a need to change the stories on which it operates. Korten says that, "the story that humans are fundamentally greedy, materialistic and violent has created an economy that destroys the living wealth of society and the planet in pursuit of an accounting entry." He points out, however, that most people implicitly accept this description of humanity in general, but reject it when describing their personal circle of friends and family. "In an effort to address [this] division, faith communities must engage in open dialogue on what it means to be human. Religion is the primary institution of society presumably based on basic values; it should therefore be at the forefront of trying to change societal values."

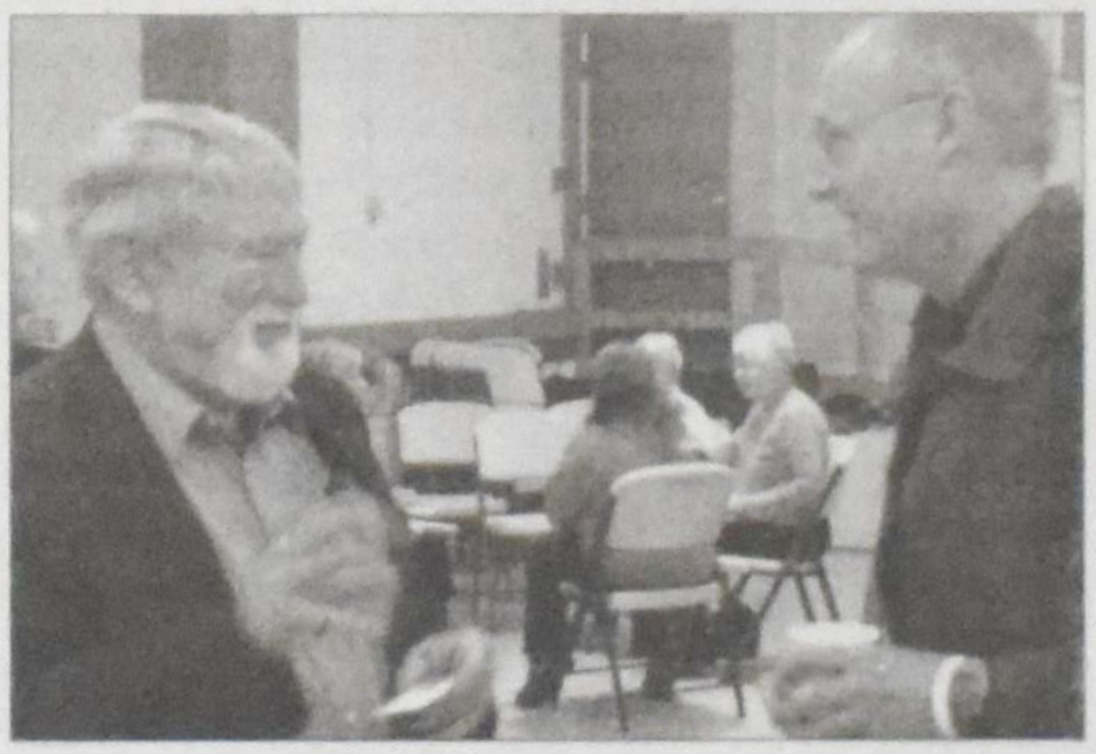
Korten anticipates that this will be an incremental process, with change occurring "one church, synagogue, temple and mosque at a time." He places significance on the efforts of individual faith communities. Indeed, Korten emphasizes the importance of finding balance locally with members of the community as well as our natural environment. Unfortunately, his work largely stays on the theoretical plane. Despite saying that "to get out of this mess virtually everything must change. . . . We must reinvent ourselves, and reinvent our society," Korten fails to answer the very basic question of how theory becomes reality.

Grassroots co-ordination?

It is something we will apparently have to determine for ourselves. If local action is the key, we must recognize that every local community is incredibly different from the next, thus making the prescription of next steps extremely difficult. This means that a certain amount of self-reflection on what works for each individual is required. By no means is this a call for complacent individualism. Indeed, what is truly needed is more community action and involvement. However, this will look different for each person, making the creation of a simple formula for action unhelpful even if it could be developed.

Furthermore, it is equally unclear how the separate and distinct actions of thousands of communities and grassroots organizations around the world will come together to create the Great Turning. Korten argues that some coordination of these groups is needed, but again, rather than straightforward prescription, simply says that for the 'Global North' "our responsibility is not to tell others, but to lead change by example." It raises the question of whether the overall coordination of the grassroots level is even desirable. It is arguably diversity of tactics and goals that make global civil society such a dynamic and positive force.

From this perspective, Korten's assertion that change is unlikely to come from those working within the system should not go unexamined. Indeed, as one of the respondents to Korten's Ottawa talk, CPJ's Kathy Vandergrift, pointed out, "The myth that we can't change the system we inherited serves the power brokers, not the public good. . . . Canada was formed as a deal between peoples – nothing more – not a grand ideal – and that's a good thing, because all deals can be adjusted when needed."


David Korten (left) in discussion with CPJ's ED Joe Gunn.

In this process, various approaches will appeal to the various groups of wider society and together contribute to overall change. Depending on the situation, groups protesting outside of international meetings can be just as important as those who manage to pitch their case to those inside, which can be just as important as those who work for change through legislation. No matter where people stand on this debate, there is one thing they agree on: change will not come if wider communities do not engage. We cannot wait for others to do the work for us, whatever that work may be. We all need to roll up our sleeves and get started. And we can begin by listening carefully to visionaries like Korten – followed by reflection and then action to figure out how such visions can be turned into reality.

Jenny Prosser, from Roseville, Ontario, is is working in Ottawa this year as CPJ's Public Justice Intern.

Columns

Principalities & Powers
David T. Koyzis

Psalm 72: the coming Messiah

In the coming months I will be writing occasionally in this space on the political implications of the Psalms, beginning today with Psalm 72, which is associated with Solomon, the second king in the Davidic dynasty. Solomon was known, of course, for his deep wisdom, but, as I suggested last year in this space, he appears eventually to have forsaken the law of God and come to rely too much on his own fallible judgement. Whether the superscription in this psalm was meant to imply that Solomon actually wrote it or that it was written for him or to him (as in the Greek Septuagint translation) is uncertain.

In any event, it may well have been composed for the coronation of a king in David's line: "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice!" This is a most appropriate request for a godly ruler desiring to govern according to the Lord's commands. And what does justice require? That he defend the poor, deliver the needy and crush oppressors; that is, he is to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected and that the laws are fairly administered.

But the psalm appears to speak of someone beyond the Davidic king: "May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!" The longest-lived of the Judahite monarchs, the wicked Manasseh, reigned 55 years – much, much less than the billions of years the sun and moon have been shining. For two millennia the church has interpreted this psalm ultimately to refer to the coming Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, whose kingdom shall have no end and on whose two comings we reflect during this Advent season. This is nicely communicated in James Montgomery's 1821 paraphrase of this psalm, *Hail to the Lord's Anointed*, with his memorable reference to "great David's greater Son."

Some years ago I myself set Psalm 72 to verse, to be sung to the proper Genevan melody. I offer the first two stanzas to our readers:

God, give your righteousness to the king,
your justice to his son,
that he may rightly judge your people
and each afflicted one.
Let mountains echo with the message
of righteousness and peace,
for he defends the poor and needy
and makes oppression cease.

Long as the sun and moon shall endure,
from age to age he lives;
like welcome rain upon the dry land,
prosperity he gives.
Until the moon from heaven vanish
shall peace and justice reign.
From sea to sea extends his kingdom,
strong shall his rule remain.

David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and will be lecturing there on Singing the Psalms *the evening of Tuesday, 5 April 2011.*

Epiphany

Words addressed to Mary, the teenage mother of Jesus, taking off loosely from Rainer Maria Rilke's (1875 – 1926) poem "Geburt Christi" (1912)

If you had not been just a virgin girl,
what would the Light which shattered earth's dark night
have meant – the angel fireworks and all?
Do you, dear Mary, possibly realize
the God who rules the nations of the world
turned tender, now lies curled within your womb?

Did you imagine God too great for this?

"Greatness"? Crisscrossing limits of divine
and human nature is a stunning feat –
no shooting star or meteor could compete.
And look! Wise kings who certainly are "great"
have trundled treasures in to fill your lap
with tribute worthy of the best who rule.

Is pregnancy a Holy Spirit kiss?

The magi gifts astonish you, that's true.
The child in swaddling clothes, however, is
immune to all comparisons: gold, myrrh,
the precious goods men trade for gain on earth
shall disappear like perfume-scented air
which fascinates for only mortal minutes

– true, what we hold dear dissolves like mist.

But (you will see) this little baby boy
shall bring the world in pain the greatest joy.

Cal Seerveld

This sacred painting by Kim Ki-Chang was published by the Israel Cultural Center in Korea. It shows Biblical characters as Koreans in traditional clothes from the Chosun Era (1400s-1900s) to challenge the typical depiction of the nativity.

Reviews

2000 Candles: Trash can for a cradle?

Tour Dates & Locations:
Friday, Dec. 10, 7:00 pm New Life Church, 400 Victoria Road North, **Guelph, ON** Presented by the Guelph Chapter of Woodland High Sch.
Saturday, Dec. 11, 7:00 pm Meadowlands Fellowship, 211 Stonehenge Drive, **Ancaster, ON** www.meadowlandsfellowship.ca
Sunday, Dec. 12 , 7:00 pm Crosslands Church, 47 Millard Ave W est, **Newmarket, ON** www.crosslands.org
Wednesday, Dec.15, 7:30 pm; Thursday, Dec. 16, 7:30 pm Friday, Dec. 17, 7:30 pm; Saturday, Dec. 18, 2:00 pm Saturday, Dec. 18, 7:30 pm Epcor Center for Performing Arts Engineered Air Theatre, 205 9th Ave SE, **Calgary, AB**
Sunday, Dec. 19, 7:00 pm Park Meadows Baptist Church 2011 – 15 Avenue North, **Lethbridge, AB**
Thursday, Dec.23, 7:30 pm Weston Park Baptist Church 1871 Weston Road, **Toronto, ON**

Stephanie Tombari

A trash can for a king is a crude cradle. But *2000 Candles*, a travelling music theatre performance, pulls it off by peeling back Christmas commercialism and bringing the birth of Jesus back to centre stage.

"We structured the show in such a way that we progressively strip away the trappings of Christmas and are left with the lighting of a single candle representing the birth of Jesus," says Tom Carson, director of the play that celebrates two millenniums of Christmases. Carson says the production is a collective creation based on each cast member's memories of a lifetime of Christmases. "We saw that our experiences of Christmas were multidimensional: a jumble of carols, presents, family dynamics, food, tradition, expectation and somewhere – perhaps buried deep inside the chaos – faith," says Carson. "We also wondered what the birth of Jesus would look like today with young, unwed parents struggling to make sense of God's impossible plan for their lives."

Carson says the show, running since 2000, is distinctly absent of "Dickensian, rosy-cheeked carolers." The set is a street corner, complete with a trash can that is eventually transformed into a makeshift manger.

Cast members Richard Peters, Ins Choi, Andrea Cross and Jeanine Noyes are each accomplished performers in their own right with dozens of credits in theatre, television and musical performance. The *2000 Candles* troupe funds its ministry through ticket sales, and churches across Canada can book the performance to help raise money for their own ministries.

For more information about scheduled dates or to book a show, visit www.2000candles.com.

(Originally published in *Faith Today* magazine Sept/Oct 2009)

Stephanie Tombari (contact@stephanietombari.com) is a freelance writer from Burlington, Ont.

Harry Potter and the death of youth: this is how the end begins

Brett Alan Dewing

There is a moment in the first third of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 1* that will stand in my mind as one of cinema's great images. The film is such a thrilling, heart-breaking beautiful work of art packed with everything its 146 minutes can hold that summing it all up would be as great a disservice as overlooking it as populist fare or cult fiction. Therefore, I will do my best to describe this one image in the belief that it communicates the intricacy of the film better than I could.

After a last-minute escape from mortal danger, the 17-year-old central characters, Ron, Hermione, and Harry, find themselves in a forest with no direction and an injured party. Ron has been badly hurt, and Hermione has ministered to his wounds as best she could. She quickly turns her attention to setting up protection to prevent another surprise assault. To do this, she lifts her hands out above her shoulders, bloodied palms out, one clutching her wand, that instrument of injury and healing.

Hermione lifts her bloodied palms in a scene that signifies a certain coming-of-age.

It is this moment, as Hermione sets in place a protective shield, that gripped my imagination so tightly.

There is such fear, conflict, and courage in her face that her palms-up stance becomes both protective and surrendering. The blood on her hands is a shocking sight, and it calls to mind a number of allusions. They are the hands of a midwife, for she has just witnessed the friends' sudden birth into adulthood. They are, of course, the hands of a surgeon who has done her best, for she has had to come face-to-face with fatality. They are the hands of a killer, for hard choices will need to be made in terrifying split seconds. They are the hands of the pieta, for friends will die at an alarming rate in the coming months. These are no mere growing pains. They are stature's stigmata, and in them is the painful and confusing reality of "growing up."

The identities of those involved are also important. As viewers, we see this blood spread across the hands of the precocious 10-year-old we met a decade ago, a girl who time and time again proved to be the titular hero's brain and conscience. The blood belongs to the cheeky red-haired scamp who brought humour and heart to the group. Is this not the experience of coming of age? The heart is somehow wounded, and the conscience is in shock, thrust into a terrifying new world in which it can never again see the clear white and black of its ideals.

This is what *Deathly Hallows* and the entire *Potter* series is about. Not magic, not adventure, but the magical adventure of youth and the crushing reality of its end. That story has been told most artfully in this film of the first part of the final book. You need look no further for proof that the boundaries of youth and adult fare, high and low art, fantasy and realism are no longer necessary. Not, at least, with a piece of art crafted so masterfully.

Brett Alan Dewing (brett@christiancourier.ca) is Features editor of CC. He lives in in Warren Center, PA.

Job opportunity:

Christian Courier is hiring a **Review Editor** to manage book, music and movie reviews to fill one page each issue. The job involves soliciting and editing reviews from contributors.

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Features

So many daggers painted red

Bert Witvoet

I was hanging out in a second-hand store one day, when I noticed a copy of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* sitting on a bookshelf. I paged through the thick tome, even started to read the first chapter about Hitler's youth. "I should buy it and take it home" I thought. "This man affected the lives of millions of people, including mine, and I have never bothered to read his book." *Mein Kampf* is the infamous book that describes Hitler's struggle ("*Mein Kampf*" means "My Struggle"). "The struggle against what?" you ask. Against all those who opposed his dream of strengthening and purifying what he considered the noblest of all races: the Germanic race.

Hitler wrote this book while he was in prison for fourteen months after a failed attempt to overthrow the German government in 1923. He wrote it with the help of fellow prisoner Rudolph Hess. His first reference to "the Jewish question" came in Chapter 2, in which he describes his "Years of Study and Suffering in Vienna."

It was a few days before Christmas when I shelled out $4.00 for what proved to be a chilling exposé of a twisted mind. Clearly Hitler's racist understanding of the superiority of Germanic blood was his religion. When I started reading the monumental two-volume book at home, we had Christmas hymns playing in the background. The contrast between the healing sounds of these hymns and the Satanic Bible I was holding in my hands could not be starker.

How bright appears the Morning Star,
With mercy beaming from afar;
The host of heaven rejoices,
O Righteous Branch, O Jesse's Rod,
The Son of Man and Son of God!
We too will lift our voices;
Jesus, Jesus, holy, holy, yet most lowly,
Come, draw near us;
Great Immanuel, come and hear us.

I placed Hitler's memoirs on my lap, sat back, and let the powerful music of another German, Johan Sebastian Bach, wash over me. The words reminded me that mercy beams from afar. It has to come a long way because of the evil all around us. After the last line "Praise be given evermore by earth and heaven" faded away in my memory, I reluctantly picked up Hitler's story where I had left off.

Hitler: "Today it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to say when the word 'Jew' first gave me ground for special thoughts. At home I do not remember having heard the word during my father's lifetime. I believe that the old gentleman would have regarded any special emphasis on this term as cultural backwardness. In the course of his life he had arrived at more or less cosmopolitan views, which, despite his pronounced national sentiments, not only remained intact, but also affected me to some extent…. Not until my fourteenth or fifteenth year did I begin to come across the word 'Jew' with any frequency, partly in connection with political discussions. This filled me with a mild distaste, and I could not rid myself of an unpleasant feeling that always came over me whenever religious quarrels occurred in my presence…. The fact that they had, as I believed, been persecuted . . . sometimes almost turned my distaste at unfavourable remarks about them into horror."

From a sociological point of view I found it noteworthy to read that in his early years Hitler had some sympathy for Jews and that he disliked any derogatory remarks made about them. But his attitude changed when he began to read the rightwing and anti-Semitic paper the *Volksblatt*. At first, he read it with some reservation, but eventually he was won over by its extreme German nationalism and stridently racist arguments. In fact, his feelings of distaste for anti-Semitism left him completely as he embraced especially the ideas of the leader of the Christian Social Party, the mayor of Vienna, Dr. Karl Lueger. From then on, he started to pay attention to the presence of Jews in Vienna.

I read on.

An Orthodox Jew walking with his children in Berlin, 1928.

Hitler: "Once, as I was strolling through the Inner City, I suddenly encountered an apparition in a black caftan and black hair locks. Is this a Jew? was my first thought…. But the longer I stared at this foreign face, scrutinizing feature for feature, the more my first question assumed a new form: Is this a German?

"Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity. Particularly the Inner City and the districts north of the Danube Canal swarmed with a people which even outwardly had lost all resemblance to Germans."

The words of Carl Tuyl, who had recently written an article entitled "My Talk With Moses," for the Dec. 14, 2009, edition of *Christian Courier*, came to mind. Such a contrast!

Tuyl: "Come with me on a swift trans-Atlantic journey to the town where I was born: The Hague. In the inner city there used to be a thriving Jewish section. I remember it well. My father bought shoes for me there, haggling to get the price lowered by a dime or so. It was a bustling part of town, with all kinds of shops, kosher butchers, second-hand clothing stores, and a beautiful synagogue. Jewish men walked around with their colourful hats and their prayer shawls peeping out from under their jackets. On Saturdays the place would go silent, the shops closed. People would worship and visit. But no sooner would the sun have set then life again would resume its usual exuberance."

Notice the vocabulary in Tuyl's description: "a thriving Jewish section," "a bustling part of town," "a beautiful synagogue," "colourful hats," "prayer shawls peeping out," "people would worship and visit," "life again would resume its usual exuberance." Tuyl clearly loved the ambience of the Jewish section, and he loved the fact that the Jewish people were different from the average inhabitant of The Hague. Contrast that with Hitler's words: "they [the Jews] became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity." Hitler had already ceased to acknowledge the humanity of Jews. In the following section from *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's dislike turns into visceral disgust and hatred.

Hitler: "The cleanliness of this people, moral and otherwise, I must say is a point in itself. By their very exterior you could tell that these were no lovers of water, and to your distress, you often knew it with your eyes closed. Later I often grew sick to my stomach from the smell of these caftan wearers. Added to this, there was their unclean dress and their generally unheroic appearance. All this could scarcely be called attractive; but it became positively repulsive when, in addition to their physical uncleanliness, you discovered the moral stains on this 'chosen people.' In a short time I was made more thoughtful than ever by slowly rising insight into the type of activity carried on by the Jews in certain fields. Was there any form of filth or profligacy, particularly in cultural life, without at least one Jew involved in it?

"If you cut even cautiously into such an abscess, you found, like a maggot in a rotting body, often dazzled by the sudden light – a *kike!*"

In the background I continued to hear the soothing sounds of a Christmas hymn that acknowledges the coming of Christ as a Jew, descended from Jesse's trunk. The delicate imagery of a rose and a floweret bright, set against the reality of the cold of winter, could easily represent the fragility of life under the harsh reign of Hitler.

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung;
of Jesse's lineage coming,
as saints of old have sung.
It came a floweret bright,
amid the cold of winter
when half spent was the night.

Hitler: "And bear in mind that there is no limit to their number; bear in mind that for one Goethe Nature can easily foist on the world ten thousand of these scribblers who poison men's souls like germ carriers of the worst sort, on their fellow men…. It was terrible, but not to be overlooked, that precisely the Jews, in tremendous numbers, seemed

Features

chosen by Nature for its shameful calling. Is this why the Jews are called 'the chosen people'?"

No, the Jews were not chosen by God to poison men's souls like germ carriers, but they were chosen to bring about salvation for the whole world. Hitler did not want to recognize the role played by Israel, nor did he understand that strength often comes out of weakness. He could not possibly sing:

Come and stand amazed, you people,
See how God is reconciled!
See his plans of love accomplished,
See his gift, this newborn child
See the Mighty, weak and tender,
See the Word who now is mute.
See the Sovereign, without splendour,
See the Fullness destitute;
The Beloved, whom we covet,
In a state of low repute.

Hitler: "The fact that nine tenths of all literary filth, artistic trash, and theatrical idiocy can be set to the account of a people, constituting hardly one hundredth of all the country's inhabitants, could simply not be talked away; it was the plain truth.

"When thus for the first time I recognized the Jew as the cold-hearted, shameless, and calculating director of this revolting vice traffic [prostitution] in the scum of the big city, a cold shudder ran down my back.

"But then a flame flared up within me. I no longer avoided the discussion of the Jewish question; no, now I sought it. And when I learned to look for the Jew in all branches of cultural and artistic life and its various manifestations, I suddenly encountered him in a place where I would have least expected to find him. When I recognized the Jew as the leader of the Social Democracy, the scales dropped from my eyes. A long soul struggle had reached its conclusion.

"I had ceased to be a weak-kneed cosmopolitan and become an anti-Semite."

Hitler's long soul struggle had reached its conclusion. And what was the outcome of that conclusion? It began with Kristallnacht, November 9-10, 1938. This is how the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum describes it:

"Seventy-one years ago, on November 9–10, 1938, the Nazis staged vicious pogroms – state sanctioned, anti-Jewish riots – against the Jewish community of Germany. These came to be known as Kristallnacht (now commonly translated as "Night of Broken Glass"), a reference to the untold numbers of broken windows of synagogues, Jewish-owned stores, community centers, and homes plundered and destroyed during the pogroms. Encouraged by the Nazi regime, the rioters burned or destroyed 267 synagogues, vandalized or looted 7,500 Jewish businesses, and killed at least 91 Jewish people. They also damaged many Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, schools, and homes as police and fire brigades stood aside. Kristallnacht was a turning point in history. The pogroms marked an intensification of Nazi anti-Jewish policy that would culminate in the Holocaust – the systematic, state-sponsored murder of Jews."

No German composer has ever produced a Kristallnacht hymn. But an assistant pastor named Joseph Mohr and his organist Franz Xaver together produced the famous Weihnacht hymn "Stille nacht, heilige nacht." It could symbolize the most perfect condemnation of what happened on Kristallnacht.

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child!
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace!
Sleep in heavenly peace!

Hitler's long soul struggle should have ended at the manger of the infant so tender and mild. Instead the conclusion of his struggle led to "the final solution" that he and his cohorts had dreamt up. Tuyl was witness to this final solution.

Tuyl: "And then I saw again this man who is a rather steady guest in my memory. I can't say that he is welcome, but he refuses to leave for good.... He wore a beard, because Jewish prisoners were forbidden to shave. One of the S.S. guards lit his beard with a match. The guard did not allow him to extinguish the flames with his hand. His face was red with blood when the fire had burned his beard. He did not speak, and he did not moan, but we all knew his pain. And we all knew that this was the man's last day. Once the guards focused on one of the Jewish prisoners, they would not quit torturing the man until he died. This man of whom I speak died late in the afternoon from repeated brutal beatings. In one way he was an exception. His body was not wheeled onto the parade ground to be included in the count that evening. An S.S. man had opened the lid of one the big sewage tanks of the camp and had thrown the body in there, as if he was disposing of a piece of garbage. I heard the sound of the lid of the tank when he put it back."

The Jewish quarter in Amsterdam in 1906 when there were 60,000 Jews in the city.

The sight of the ruthless disposal of an innocent human being and the sound of the lid of the sewage tank reverberated in Tuyl's memory years later. It's one of those images that poignantly capture the inhumanity of the Nazis. Yet they saw themselves as protected by God. I remember reading on the belt buckle of German soldiers: "*Gott mit uns*," meaning, "God with us." As a matter of fact, even Hitler thought God was on his side. Just read the final segment I extracted from his diary of death:

Belt buckle reads "God with us".

Hitler: "If with the help of his Marxist creed, the Jew is victorious over the other peoples of the world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity and this planet will, as it did millions of years ago, move through the ether devoid of men. Eternal Nature inexorably avenges the infringement of her commands. Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord."

This "work of the Lord" involved the massacre of more than six million Jews. Hitler became a modern-day Herod. One of the Christmas songs I heard while reading was a Dutch poem by Joost van den Vondel that I had memorized when I attended high school in Holland in the 1940s, and which had been set to music: "*O Kerstnacht schoner dan de dagen, hoe kan Herodes 'tlicht verdragen dat in uw duisternisse blinkt.*" I translate it here as my final lament over the horrific onslaught caused by Hitler's sick mind.

O Christ Night, brighter than the days,
How can King Herod stand the rays
That blindingly your darkness pierce.
He's celebrated and adored?
His pride rejects the reasoning word
However loud it stabs his ears.

The Innocent he tries to slaughter
By murdering both son and daughter,
And causes sorrow shamelessly,
In Bethlehem and in the field,
He wakens Mother Rachel's spirit,
Who starts to wander aimlessly.

First in the east, then in the west.
Who will bring comfort to her breast
Now that she finds her children dead?
Now that she sees them choke in blood
When barely born in this dark world,
So many daggers painted red?

I did not read all of *Mein Kampf*. Much of what Hitler wrote about his ideal state is absolute nonsense. But what I did read during last year's Advent days reaffirmed my belief that the real struggle in human life has been and always will be the struggle between good and evil. The combined effect for me of reading and reflecting upon Hitler's words along with Carl Tuyl's account, while listening to Christmas hymns, was one of great sadness, and a deep, deep appreciation for the coming of Jesus into this dark world.

Bert Witvoet is a Contributing Editor for CC and lives with his wife, Alice, in St. Catharines, Ont.

Columns

From Toddlers to Teens
by Denise Dykstra

Objections to a season of plenty

Warning: this column is devoid of Christmas cheer. Read at your own risk.

Christmas is only a few weeks away and I haven't done a single thing to get ready. I haven't hit the mall to buy gifts; I haven't picked up wrapping paper, ribbon and tape; I haven't baked, decorated or mailed out cards. Somehow I just can't seem to get in the Christmas mood.

This lack of Yuletide cheer isn't unusual for me. I often feel a sense of irritation when December rolls around. I feel resentment toward many of the traditions that accompany the holidays. I find certain customs wasteful and stressful, and completely unrelated to the birth of Jesus.

Take the practice of gift giving, for example. This tradition is one I've frequently struggled with. Not because I don't like surprising and pleasing my loved ones, but because too often gift giving feeds into our North American compulsion to consume and acquire. Most of us don't have a single material need. We give each other "stuff" even though we already have houses full of unnecessary items.

We may mean well when we gift someone, but quite frankly we're often being wasteful. And even worse, many of us can't afford to be. We spend the money even though it runs outside of our household budgets. We get deeper and deeper in debt in order to give each other objects that may not be particularly well liked and might very well end up in a downstairs closet or the local Goodwill.

'Give like Santa . . .'

There are ways around this sort of waste, of course. I'm thinking of the World Vision catalogue, grocery store gift cards, and hand-made presents. Unfortunately these ideas are not the norm. Many people find them too impersonal or too time-consuming.

As much as I like the idea of homemade gifts, I too am hesitant to go this route. Other holiday traditions already take up so much of my time. North American Christians tend to load up on a lot of extra work in December. Christmas pageants and choir concerts steal our evenings, and extra volunteer commitments at church are a staple. We're so busy we often become stressed out. And we don't spend enough time with our families.

Even the infamous Christmas dinner is a time-consuming tradition. How many hours are spent cooking a turkey with stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, cranberry sauce, and vegetables? How much stress do those of us who are not natural chefs put ourselves through? How much food is leftover and wasted when all is said and done? And why exactly? Because someone out there decided at some point in time that this is what we should eat on December 25. It's fine, I guess, if it's our favorite meal. But there are a lot of other foods I like better. And I can guarantee that Mary and Joseph didn't eat turkey and all the fixings in the stable.

And so we come to the crux of the matter. Too often Christmas traditions have nothing at all to do with the birth of our Lord and Saviour. They steal our time and money and leave us with a load of stress.

That's not to say everyone should disregard these traditions, however. Many people delight in celebratory practices and act stewardly when it comes to them. And God does want us to enjoy life. I'm just saying that we should evaluate traditions instead of blindly incorporating them into our festivities. We should ensure that they add to our celebration of the coming of the Christ child, not distract from it.

Sometimes we get so involved in what we're "supposed" to do that we forget all about the reason we're doing it. If our traditions create an emotional and spiritual distance between us and the baby who brought renewal to our world, they don't deserve a place in our home. If the Christmas tree and 10-pound turkey take our focus off Jesus, we'd be better off exchanging them for a plain wooden manger and a frozen pizza.

Denise Dykstra (dykstras@telus.net) lives in Edmonton, Alberta. She's a writer and mother of five.

Simple home-made ornaments

2 cups flour
1 cup salt
1 cup water
1 Tsp oil (optional)

Mix salt and flour. Add in half the water, then gradually add the remaining water. Knead until the dough is smooth.

Roll out the dough (to about 1/4 inch thickness) on baking paper, wax paper, or directly on a cookie sheet. Use cookie cutters, cut-out templates, or just use your hands to make shapes.

Add details to the ornaments with a toothpick and knife.

Use a straw to make a hole so you can hang the ornament.

Bake at 325°F for 20 minutes or until dry.

Paint and decorate; enjoy!

Country Living
Meindert van der Galien

The Christmas industry

As Christmas draws near, people move into high gear. They will be going at a pretty fast clip these next few weeks. A few days before the big day, everyone asks *"Are you ready for Christmas?"*

It's so easy to get caught up in the commercialism of Christmas. Last month I was in a Canadian Tire store, flabbergasted at the huge section devoted entirely to Christmas decorations. There were boxes and boxes of many different kinds of ornaments, tinsels, lights, glittery things and stuff I'd never seen before.

In December, towns and cities and the rural neighbourhood take on a whole new look. It's a beautiful sight when houses and trees all are done up with decorative lighting. It's great! But Christmas has become an industry – a huge one for the manufacturers and retailers.

People want an old-fashioned Christmas

People all seem to enjoy the hustle and bustle of the days leading up to Christmas. But on Christmas Day, everyone wants an old-fashioned Christmas with a little snow on the ground, a tree, gifts, family, peace, turkey and the works, music and Christmas carols. Ah, it's wonderful. *I'm dreaming of a white Christmas; just like the ones I used to know….*

Check the Christmas and Seasons Greetings ads in the farm papers and the weeklies and you'll see mostly old-fashioned Christmas or Santa Claus themes. You won't see shiny new tractors or combines in the ads. Chances are you'll see a horse and sleigh, an old tractor from the 1950s, happy folks skating on a pond, reindeer, and a quiet farm scene – all nostalgic stuff!

You don't see Christmas cards with snowmobiles, laptops, iPods, large screen televisions or late model vehicles either. I checked the Christmas cards we received last year and noticed every card features an old-fashioned theme. Many cards have peaceful country scenes. The prettiest card has a picture of winter – snow and birds in a tree. There's a log cabin with wood smoke rising straight up. You know it must be wood smoke because a small row of split firewood is stacked on the porch. The card says *Peace on Earth.*

In recent years it has become fashionable to refer to Christmas as the "Holiday Season."

A friend of mine added "These cards forgot to say 'Merry Christmas,' so I am saying it to you: 'Merry Christmas!'"

Christmas cards often depend on nostalgic scenes like this.

Consumer-overload

A 2007 study commissioned by World Vision says Britons spend approximately $4.7 billion each year purchasing Christmas gifts that are unwanted and unappreciated by their recipients. Almost 40 percent of the unwanted gifts collect dust in closets, and almost 30 percent are sold on the Internet. A quarter of the respondents couldn't recall what anyone bought them for Christmas last year, and half couldn't recall what they received from their own spouses.

The figures are likely similar on this side of the Atlantic. Instead of wasting your money on gifts, consider giving the money to a worthwhile charity.

Singing from the heart

My wife and I go Christmas carolling one evening the week before Christmas with a small group from our church. We visit some of the elderly from our congregation in their homes, the shut-ins and those in homes for the aged. A few extra singers – usually residents – sometimes join our group. Last year, a man in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease joined us and sang from the heart, never glancing once at our song sheets. It was touching. This man didn't know his family anymore, but he knew the words to his favourite Christmas hymns, and sang right along with us. Moments like these trump the Christmas industry any day, and you won't find them at a big box store.

Have a blessed Christmas!

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew (Ontario) farmer and agricultural writer.

Intangible Things
Heidi VanderSlikke

Smoking angels (and other Christmas traditions)

When the days are various shades of grey and the nights are endlessly dark, it's time for our annual trip to the Benjamin Tree Farm. Jack and I search for the perfect Christmas tree – a symmetrical one that won't fall over, one that will still have some needles left on it by New Year's Day. We reminisce about memorable trees of the past, some of which had to be literally tied to the wall to keep them upright, and gloat about our recent acquisition of the world's best tree stand. He munches on the free shortbread cookies while I check out, and nearly chokes on his hot apple cider when he sees the numbers come up on the cash register. The shock subsides once the tree stands stately in our living room and the scent of fresh evergreen fills the house.

Then he helps me haul two enormous boxes down from the shelves where they sit for eleven months of the year. After that he disappears to leave the decorating to me.

Those boxes hold more than thirty years' worth of memories in a collection of lights, baubles and assorted treasures, all guaranteed to lift my mood and brighten the dismal winter days. (Well, once they're up anyway.)

I untangle several strands of tiny coloured lights. No matter how carefully I pack them away the previous year, it seems they somehow tie themselves into knots when I'm not looking. But I'm no rookie. I know enough to plug them in and make sure they're working *before* I carefully position each little light on the branches. At the top I place a trumpeting angel. If I had my way all the lights would be white, but Jack loves the colours, so we compromise. Most of the balls are silver or gold, except the keepsake items of course.

There's a teddy bear bell – the first ornament I ever purchased for us; a miniature rocking horse with 1988 inscribed on it, a gift from my mother the year we built the new house; and a gorgeous Delft blue ball courtesy of my mother-in-law. There are handmade items from the kids' school-days, and the ceramic crayons Jessica got to pick from the dentist's tree when she got her first (and only) cavity filled. At the very bottom of one box are three pine cones from our first Christmas tree (a story in itself) and three gigantic Bristol board and construction paper creations, lovingly crafted by each of our children during their years in Mrs. McCormick's classroom.

And there, in a plastic box is our first tree-topper, a blonde, chubby-cheeked angel, surrounded by glittering tinsel and a ring of lights. She burned out years ago, but I can't bear to part with her as I recall her last glorious night of service.

Hark! The angel . . .

On a cold December evening I snuggled up on the sofa with my children. By the light of the Christmas tree we read the story of shepherds and angels and the amazing news they delivered. Too young to follow the story, Jessica sat contentedly on my lap and looked at the pictures, turning the pages when prompted. James and Stephanie cozied up on either side, listening with rapt attention. I closed the book and we sang *Away in a Manger*. It was one of those precious moments every mother cherishes.

Suddenly James blurted out, "Mommy, do angels smoke?"

Assuming he wanted to delay bedtime, I said with a sigh, "Of course not, James. Don't be silly."

"Well that one does!" he said, pointing to the top of our tree.

He was right. A smoky haze surrounded our fair-haired cherub and curled upward to the ceiling. I pulled the plug immediately and apologized to my son for doubting his motives. "I guess sometimes angels actually do smoke."

Gifts and goodies, decorations and extravagant family meals – none of them has anything to do with the real meaning of Christmas. But because Christmas is so powerfully significant to us as believers, because it is all about light defeating darkness and new life capable of rejuvenating even the most desperate soul, it seems totally appropriate to celebrate in extraordinary ways, savouring the memories of years gone by and eagerly anticipating the joy of Christ's return.

May your heart and home overflow with the fruit of the Spirit this Christmas season, and may you experience the glow that only Christ can bring to your life throughout the whole year.

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, On.

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

A place to find rest

". . . and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn!" Luke 2:7

Luke writes well on the accounts that led up to Jesus' birth, and I find richness in sitting with these words and meditating on possible deeper meanings, especially during the Christmas season. What struck me was in chapter two, when we see Joseph and Mary going to register for the census. Joseph took Mary, who was pledged to be married to him, and probably very pregnant at the time.

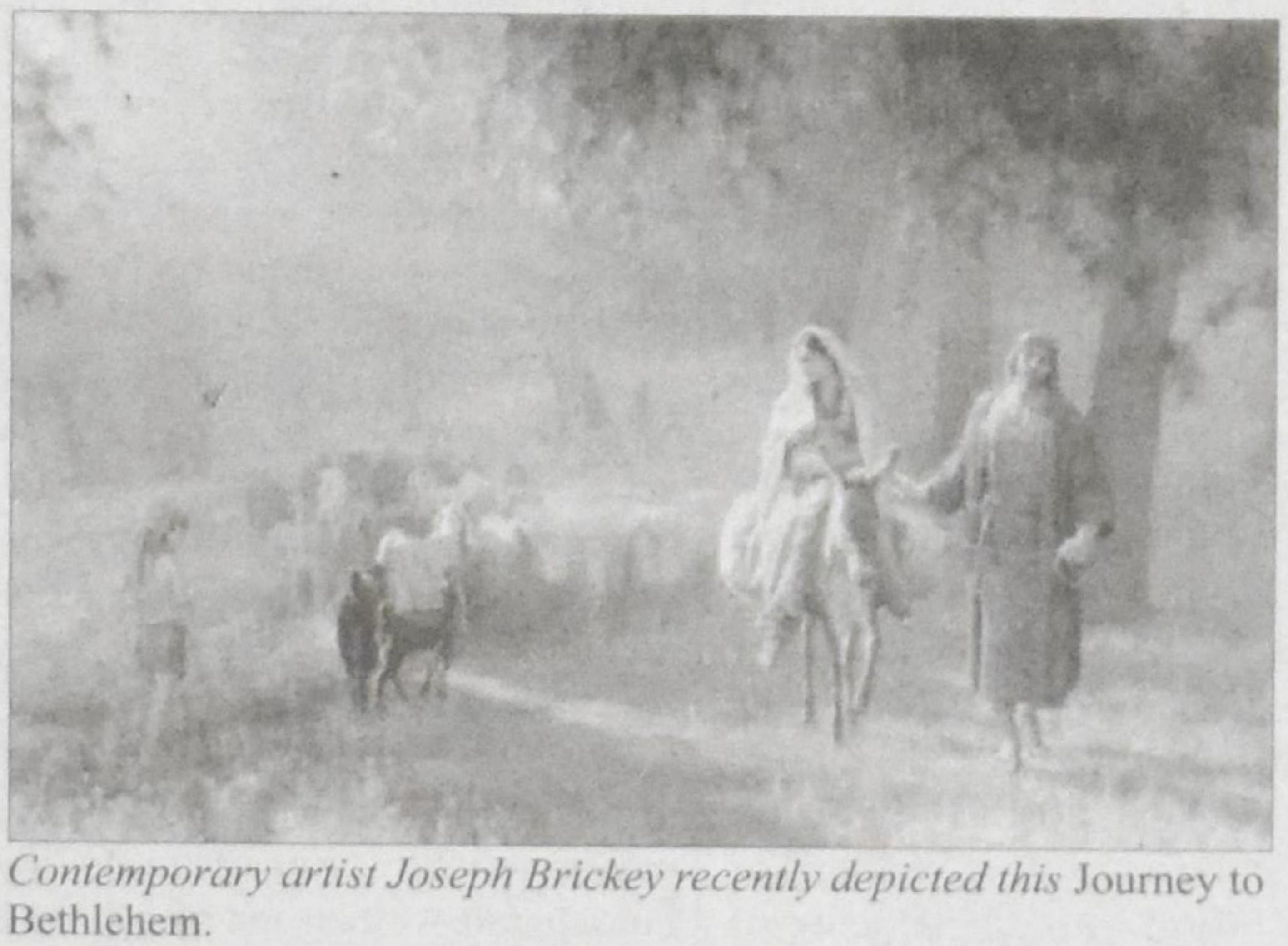
Imagine this young man and woman, known by everyone, going to register for the census. Imagine the words hurled at them in silence as they traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. There was no hiding her pregnancy. How do you explain that it wasn't your fiancé's baby, but rather God's baby!

I can only image the hardship of ridicule and isolation that they may have faced on that trip to Bethlehem. We read that there was no room for them in the inn. Could it be that doors were closed because of their situation and surrounding gossip? Did word travel fast? Did the appearance of sin, exposed to all those around them, leave them without a place to rest or give birth to our Saviour Jesus?

Nevertheless, this young couple – in the face of questions, comments, ridicule and isolation – took the step to trust the Lord God and faithfully walk out the journey set before them. It led them to a stable.

Even though I walk

As I ponder that, I am challenged to look at my own life and ask, "How do I walk out life, especially when my decisions and actions will be ridiculed, questioned and I face rejection and isolation from others? What do I do when I sense that the Lord is asking me to do or live differently than others around me?"



Contemporary artist Joseph Brickey recently depicted this Journey to Bethlehem.

I faced one of those decisions in 2005 when I felt the Lord say, "Walk out of the gay identity, it's not my best plan for you." People around me ridiculed me. Some said I was crazy, that I couldn't change and that God had made me this way. Some said just be yourself. Some raised their eyebrows when I shared my experience of hearing God's voice. Now most of these voices came from outside the body of Christ, but surprisingly some came from within the church community.

Walking out of a gay identity and into the wholeness that Christ had extended to me was difficult at times. To live differently meant I had to give up many things to follow him. I wonder – what did Joseph and Mary give up? Did friends stop talking to them? How about those in the synagogue? Did the leaders shun them because of the situation? Or worse, did people just remain silent, and talk behind their backs?

As we enter into the Christmas season, I ponder the magnitude of how Joseph and Mary walked out this journey of faith and trust in their heavenly Father and wonder whether their community walked with them.

Thankfully, I have had a core group of people who have walked this journey with my family and me. They have cheered us on when the going has gotten tough, helped supply our needs when provision was very lean. It reminds me of the gifts that the wise men brought Mary and Joseph. God knew that they would need help, even in the area of finances, and he provided that for this young family.

As we go into the season of gift giving, how can we be a community that gives? Rather than focus on what we want, what about focusing on what we can give. Maybe a word of encouragement to a person who is dealing with difficult issues? What about financial aid to a needy family or missionary? Or maybe being a friend to that person or couple who everyone talks about behind their back because they just can't get their life in order? What would it be like for them to experience the gift of love, the feeling of embrace rather than rejection? How can we offer those around us a place to find rest?

Kenny Warkentin (Kenny@livingwaterscanada.org) is an avid blogger, thinker and artist. He lives in Edmonton.

Features

Thoughts about Islam and Christianity – Part IV

CC continues the discussion of how Christianity and Islam relate to each other in this six-part series. The two participants are John H. Boer and Bert den Boggende. The two scholars wrote their answers to each question independently of each other. There may be overlap, there maybe differences of opinion, we don't know. We hope our readers will benefit from this discussion. We also encourage readers to join the discussion via letters to the editor or comments on our website.

Question 4: How does the Quran say women should be treated, and does this conform to or contradict what is practiced in many Muslim countries or cultures?

Women in the Quran: Quranic standards and actual practice

John H. Boer

I interpret the questions as intended to evoke a discussion about Muslim suppression of women, since that is such a major Christian concern.

If you ask the same question about the Bible, you will get a wide variety of (contradictory) answers. There are Old Testament texts about women from which pretty well all Christians distantiate themselves. For one thing, these texts are written from a male point of view – what the male should do for, with or to women. Women were subject to men and valued mainly as wives and mothers. A father could sell his daughter into slavery. A father could annul his daughter's vows or pledge, as could a husband his wife's. Adultery could lead to stoning, but for both partners. The husband had various unilateral rights over his wife. A woman was worth half a man. Women could be taken as booty after victorious battles. They could become ceremonially unclean, etcetera. Christians have long rejected all or most of these ideas for sound biblical and theological reasons. In the New Testament, women were restricted in their leadership roles.

You find similar situations in the Quran and in the Muslim community. There is a wide range of interpretations from the literal to contextual-historical. Just as Christians have largely rejected the OT perspectives on women, especially those they see as oppressive, so do many educated Muslims argue their way out of similar Quranic texts.

Most Muslim men tend to agree that women are honourable but fragile creatures that need to be protected from other men. Hence, the elaborate precautions to which some are subjected in terms of movement and dress code, while others dress and move about as they please. Most men regard women as too emotional and, therefore, insist that they, the men, should do the thinking and make decisions for them. Women are seen as powerful individuals, as long as they play their legitimate role as mothers and wives who bring up and teach the next generation. They are allowed to conduct business and own property, but not at the expense of their primary role in the family.

Modern restrictions

There is currently a dynamic at work in many Muslim communities that tends to restrict women more than was the case in the past, especially with respect to dress. One American female Muslim medical doctor practicing in Saudi was absolutely amazed at the restrictions placed on women in Saudi and condemned it outright as a retrograde form of Islam.

At the levels of militant fundamentalism and folk Islam, the literal interpretation tends to hold sway. Folk Islam is intimately mixed up with local pre-Islamic cultures. Its adherents often identify these foreign accretions as part of core Islam, with the result that anyone critiquing some cultural tradition may be accused of attacking Islam itself. In Saudi, public amputations constitute public entertainment after Friday prayers, but many educated Muslims are horrified.

The reality is that there is hardly any consistent pattern to be found in the Muslim world. In many Muslim communities, women play a much larger role than the above would lead us to expect, while in most countries stoning and amputation form only a distant memory. There have been several female Muslim heads of state in the largest Muslim countries! If Islam or the Quran were really as reprehensible and suppressive in its core as what we witness today in some quarters, then the high Cordovan, Persian, Turkish and Egyptian civilizations and cultures from the past would not have been possible.

No Muslim renaissance

A major difference between Christianity and Islam is that the former has experienced the philosophical developments from the Renaissance – initially spurred on by Cordovan Islam – up to the current climate in the West. Before those developments, Christian individuals, religious leaders and nations were cruel and intolerant in ways hard to believe today, even though we already had the Bible. The change towards more civilized relationships is due as much to those philosophical developments as to our reading of the Bible. Muslims have not gone through this development.

How should women be treated according to the Quran? Your answer will be determined by the approach you prefer, literal or contextual-historical. Does the practice of some countries reflect the Quran correctly? To the extent that it is the result of a literal interpretation and is mixed up with traditional cultural accretions, liberal Muslims would say "No." But those who practice various forms of suppression of women, will, of course, answer "Yes!" They are the literalists. So, how and on what basis do I, a non-Muslim, answer these questions? Which is the true Islam or the right interpretation of the Quran?

Muslim women have seen gradual improvements

Bert denBoggende

While women are frequently mentioned in the Quran, the index of its *Authorized English Version* has no entry for them. Islam allows for polygamy, which may explain why most references to women are connected to marriage and divorce. Over time Muhammad had eleven wives and several concubines. As Sura 4:129 suggests, he realized that polygamy could cause problems: "In polygamy, you can never be equally attentive towards your wives, no matter how hard you try. However, you shall not be so partial that you neglect your wife." Regulation in the Quran and Hadith raised the status of women by prohibiting female infanticide, abolishing women's status as property, establishing women's legal capacity, and granting women the right to receive their own dowry. While pre-adolescent girls could be married without consent, adult women could not be forced to marry without consent. Muhammad's love for his first wife Khadija became the model for Muslims. As an extension, spousal abuse became unacceptable. Khadija exemplifies the fact that women played important roles in early Islam, as did Rabi'a al-'Adawiya (d. 801), a non-Arab who fully developed a mystical doctrine in Sufism.

Although the Quran declared women and men equal before God, women remained unequal otherwise. According to Sura 4:34, "Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other." Since God has made men breadwinners, "righteous women will accept this arrangement obediently." Legally, daughters inherit only half of what sons receive. Two men are needed as witnesses, but if there are not two men, then one man and two women will suffice. While men have several options for divorce, women have very limited grounds. According to a hadith, women should always have a male guardian. Religiously, Wahhabis prefer that women do not attend Friday prayer service; others have no objections, but separate women and men in the mosque. Menstruating women are prohibited to pray and fast or even read the Quran, according to the Hanbali school.

Slow improvements socially

Socially, inequality is expressed in various ways. The Maliki school asserts that "a woman should speak more softly than a man." Women are admonished to dress modestly. This is apparent in veiling, which existed in pre-Islamic society as a visible sign of the superior power and right of men. However, it did not become common among Muslims until the tenth century. In fact, the Quran does not specifically prescribe the hijab, chador and burqa, but Sura 24:31 gives a clue: "Tell believing women to subdue their eyes and keep chaste, and not to show off their beauty beyond that which is necessarily visible."

The last century has brought numerous reforms for women in the private and public spheres. Legal changes included the abolition of polygamy in some countries. Educationally significant strides have been made. During European imperialism, schools for girls were opened, although they were not of the same quality as those for boys. Nevertheless, they produced women who could earn their living in a few professions, such as teaching and nursing. Between the two world wars, the number of high schools for girls increased, and some girls went on to higher education, a movement accelerating after World War II.

Countries vary in customs

In 1937 Egypt, 94 percent of the women were illiterate; in 1960, it was 83 percent. Especially modernists have argued that girls should be educated and be allowed to work. In most Muslim countries girls now go to school, including higher education. While most women ended up in factories or as domestics, they could aspire to become novelists, academics and ministers, even prime ministers.

In 1923 an Egyptian feminist stepped off the train in Cairo and drew back her veil to the applause of many. Since then younger, educated Egyptian women could go unveiled or lightly covered and attend theatre performances, while this was not necessarily possible in other countries. In other words, clothing depends on country and status. In addition to education, other factors contributed to the acceleration of change, such as travel, the media and nationalism. The gradual changing role of women and family structure raised questions about a healthy national community.

But legal and educational changes do not imply that social customs change immediately. Many Muslims still hold that girls should marry early, that marriages should be arranged by the family, and that men can divorce their wives easily. One early legal scholar stated that barber-surgeons should carry tools for circumcision, since "circumcision is a religious obligation for men and women." For many tribal Muslims, notably in Africa, that "obligation" has not changed. Unquestionably many women still accept their unequal situation in principle, even though there are increasing numbers who do not.

Columns

THE PUBLIC SQUARE
Harry Antonides

Islamization, one step at a time

What do the following items about Islam have in common? Do they show a pattern that we should be concerned about?

- In the U.S., National Public Radio fired Juan Williams for saying that he was nervous when he noticed Muslims traveling on the same airplane.
- A New Jersey court ruled that a Muslim had the right to force his wife to have sex with him, since sharia law demands that women always obey their husbands. This decision was overturned.
- Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders is on trial for publicly criticizing Islam, and he is now forced to live like a fugitive in his own country. Who is the guilty here?

No isolated case

Nina Shea and Paul Marshall pointed out that this is not an isolated case. They warned: "[T]he greatest threat by this case is not to a lone Dutch firebrand, but to Europeans at large, whose fundamental freedoms of speech and religion are being steadily undermined. Those trying to repress these individual rights in the name of sensitivity are gaining ground with each case that upholds the state's power to regulate the content of speech on Islam."

- The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has started a lawsuit against Oklahoma's new anti-sharia law that was approved by 70 percent of the voters. Oklahoma District Judge Vicki Miles-Lagrange issued a temporary restraining order blocking this new legislation that would ban any use of Islamic law in its jurisdiction.
- In the U.K, the London borough of Tower Hamlets has elected the Islamic supremacist Lutfur Rahman as executive mayor, who now controls a billion dollar budget. (Previously he was dropped by the Labour Party.) Rahman successfully campaigned for mayor with the help of an Islamic supremacist organization, the Islamic Forum of Europe.
- In Canada, prominent authors Mark Steyn and Ezra Levant were accused of hate crimes by Professor Mohamed Elmasry. They were forced to defend themselves before Human Rights Commissions, where they were eventually declared not guilty. Nonetheless, it cost them many thousands of dollars and a great deal of time. What is even more onerous is that such cases before kangaroo courts have a chilling effect on most writers. Freedom of speech is the loser.
- Five years ago a prominent official of the CIBC implied in one of his published research reports that in the Muslim/Arab world mullahs and sheiks have a say about the level of oil production. The Canadian arm of CAIR took offence, and demanded a letter of apology and sensitivity training for the wayward bank official. The Bank immediately folded, wrote a groveling letter and ordered such training for this employee.

This was not tempest in a teapot, but another skirmish in the fight against an aggressive, intolerant form of Islam, eager to replace our historic freedoms with what the Koran teaches about the rule of Allah. The problem is that our elite tends to go AWOL. I suspect that is because it does not know what is at the core of its own tradition that is good and honourable and worth defending.

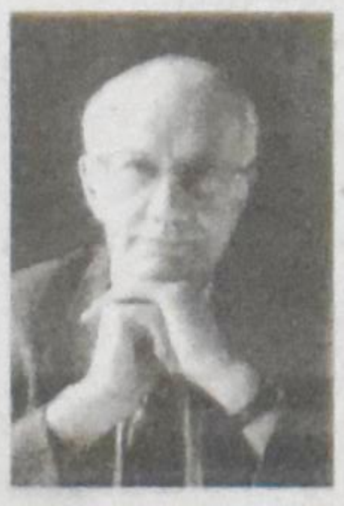
A dangerous slide

These seven instances of Islamic attacks on our fundamental freedom of speech in a variety of Western countries are just a small sample. But they represent a sea change about the meaning of freedom most of us have taken for granted. A great deal of impetus for curtailing freedom of speech is generated by the 56-Member Organization of the Islamic Conference at the UN where it functions as a powerful voting block. One of its stated goals is to "Protect and defend the true image of Islam, to combat defamation of Islam and encourage dialogue among civilizations and religions."

This organization has succeeded in passing a UN resolution that urges member countries to criminalize the defamation of religion. Obviously this is only intended for the benefit of Islam, as is clearly evident in a number of countries, including the Netherlands, Canada, and even more so in England.

Despite the soothing words of the OIC and CAIR, they have proven ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and other radical Islamist organizations that want to impose sharia law on the West. CAIR's founding chairman Omar Ahmad said in 1998, "Islam isn't in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant. The Quran should be the highest authority in America."

You have been told.



Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca)
He lives in Willowdale, Ontario.

Technically Speaking
Derek Schuurman

The medium is the message

"The medium is the message" is a famous phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan to emphasize that media and technologies embed messages that are more significant than the content they may deliver. In fact, McLuhan is quoted as saying that compared to the medium, the content "has about as much importance as the stenciling on the casing of an atomic bomb." This may sound like an exaggeration, but the truth is that most of us aren't even aware of the effects of the embedded messages that reside in the various media around us. We are familiar with McLuhan's phrase without really understanding its implications. In his book *Understanding Media*, McLuhan describes the "content" of a medium as a juicy piece of meat carried by a burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The nature of the medium, like the burglar, is that we are left unaware of its impact because our minds are distracted by the content.

Various media carry a wide range of content, but the impacts of these technologies go beyond the messages they carry. The invention of the automobile, for example, brought more than just a new way to get around town; it provided a freedom and mobility that has fundamentally changed our neighborhoods, our cities and the way we live. The Internet has made an equally large impact. The web is a medium that feeds us information in small bits and encourages us to "surf" rather than dive down deep into reflective reading. The Internet, particularly sites such as Wikipedia, has fundamentally challenged the notion of authoritative sources and truth while promoting the "wisdom of the crowds." Likewise, the world of humanoid robotics, cyborgs and artificial intelligence bring more than new tools; it has led to questions about what it means to be human and how we are distinct from machines.

The incarnate message

In his book *Flickering Pixels,* author Shane Hipps explores the media God has used to send messages to his people. In the Scriptures, God sent messages in a burning bush, stone tablets, prophets, and also through angels. God even used the medium of a donkey to give a message to Balaam. But God went much further than these media.

Deconstructing Marshall McLuhan

The gospel of John begins with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This Word is more than a message; it is the person of Jesus Christ. Later in this chapter we read, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Hipps, citing the writings of McLuhan, makes the observation that God's medium and message are brought perfectly together in Jesus Christ. The birth of the infant Jesus that we celebrate at Christmas is a celebration of the word becoming flesh. The real significance and impact of this event is easy to miss.

This Christmas we will be bombarded by various media including Christmas advertising, Christmas movies, Christmas carols, inflatable Santa Claus yard decorations and television specials. The "medium is the message" is still as relevant as ever. Each new medium carries its own message, whether or not we are aware of it. In the flurry of competing media and messages, let's not forget to marvel at the mystery of the Word who became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Derek Schuurman teaches at Redeemer University College. He and his wife have four children and they live in Hamilton, Ontario.

Painting by Govert Flinck (1639) Aankondiging aan de herders. *God sent angels to proclaim the greatest message of all.*

Features

Second Chances

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Deborah bit her lip as she watched Mr. Tom Souter defiantly square his bulky shoulders and stomp out of Grace Church's sanctuary, beneath glittering Christmas stars hanging from the ceiling.

Someone tapped Deborah on the shoulder. She turned. "Patricia!" she said, then hugged the chairperson of the Refugee Committee. "I'm glad nothing rattles you!"

"Is something wrong?" asked the older woman.

"Oh, yes!" Deborah said.

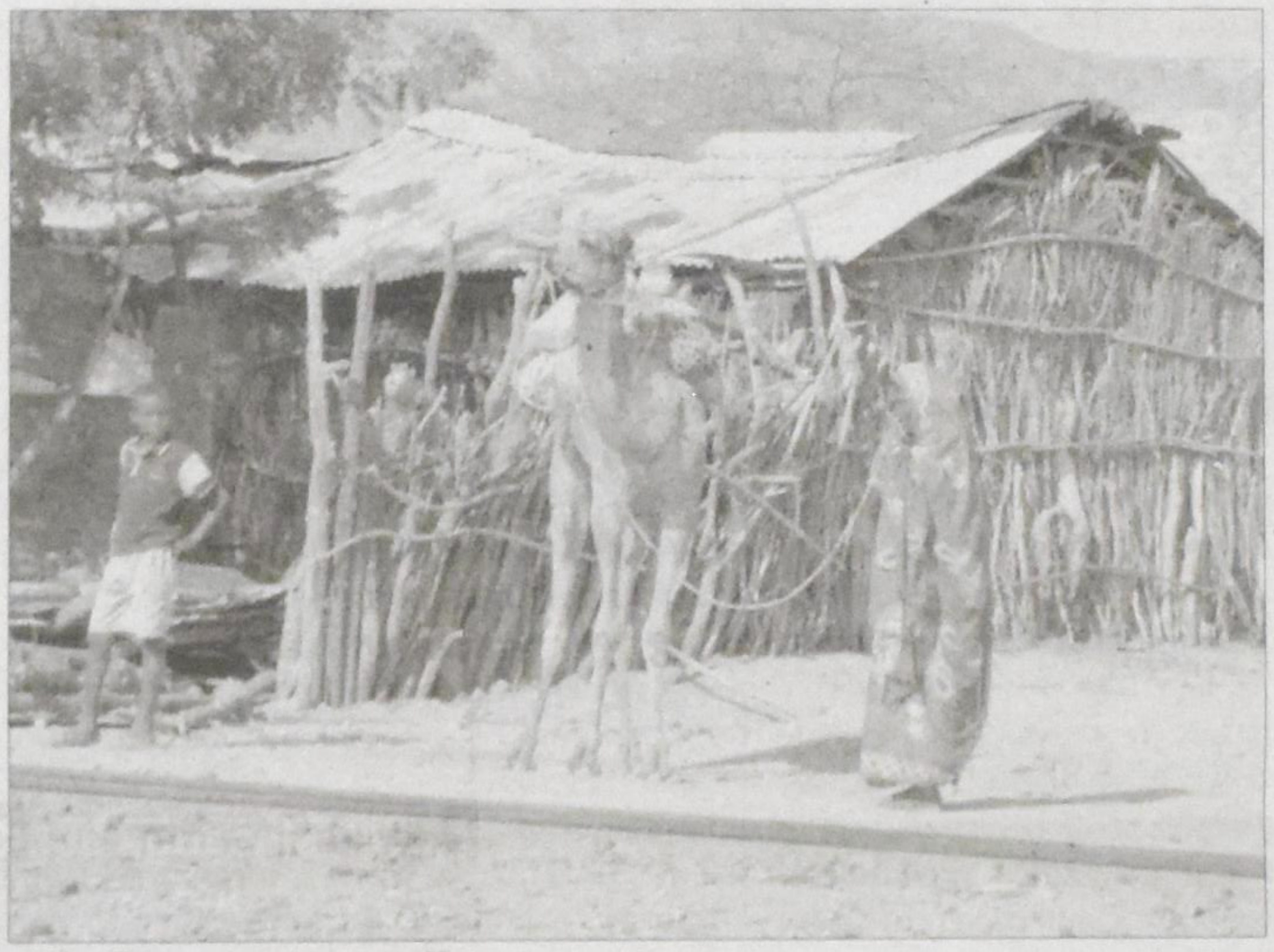
"So, what's the issue?" Patricia asked.

"This is," Deborah said. She held up a scribbled note she'd wrung out like a wet towel when Mr. Souter had angrily berated her for its contents – an announcement she'd made to the congregation about refugee sponsorship. "He's adamant that it isn't financially responsible for us to sponsor Amanuel and Elilta. He says that the three families we've sponsored in the past are enough. We've done our duty to Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. We don't owe Eritrea anything." Deborah mimicked what she thought might be Mr. Souter's gruff business boardroom voice, "'Did you figure out what a whole year of taking care of another family will cost us?'"

Patricia chuckled, and said, "I guess he wasn't talking about time and energy."

"No!" Deborah grimaced. "He meant money, money and more money."

"It's hard to understand," Patricia said. "Tom's in his mid-fifties, and he's had his share of financial success. Three strong businesses. But he's suffered, too. Two businesses failed, and his wife died of breast cancer."



Hill village near Asmara, Eritrea.

"Then why isn't he more compassionate?" Deborah asked.

"Toxic stink or beautiful fragrance," Patricia said wisely. "Often one or the other seems to result when people suffer."

"Maybe if he saw what I saw in Kakuma he would be different," Deborah said.

In March, Deborah and six others had visited Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. Nowhere – that's what Kakuma meant. And that's what it was – a middle-of-nowhere barren haven, its entrance beside a bleak, desert field of graves, marked by simple wooden crosses and piles of stones.

"Are you still having bad dreams about it?" Patricia asked.

Deborah nodded. She had told Patricia about a nightmare she'd had but not about what had accompanied it – the remembered sensation of her milk letting down to feed the son she had borne two years ago, then lost at five weeks. Daniel.

"The same dream keeps coming back," Deborah said. "The mother's wailing sends shivers down my spine. She's desperately trying to make the baby breastfeed. He's so thin and weak. You know how dreams are – I see strange details like the canvas walls of the hospital flapping in the wind and dead grasshoppers on the cement floor." She sighed. "I still can hardly believe that the baby died right in front of us. And for some odd reason, at that moment, I thought, no crying he makes."

"From Away in a Manger," Patricia said.

"That's right. In Kakuma the thought was there and gone, but this morning when we sang the same line, I felt angry. I'm not even sure why."

"Probably because it isn't true. After all, Jesus came to cry with us," Patricia said. "Come on, let's go to the Fellowship Hall and see how many people have signed up to help."

"Hopefully lots," Deborah said. "Six days isn't a long time to get ready."

In the next days, the refugee committee and the congregation prepared for Amanuel and Elilta's arrival. Deborah fielded phone calls and organized pick up and delivery of goods to the apartment that Patricia and Mike had searched for and rented. Bill arranged transportation to the airport and helped Tyler, Chantel and Gwen scrub floors, wash cupboards, organize the kitchen, buy groceries, move furniture and purchase winter clothes.

The night before the couple's arrival, Deborah's stomach ached as she tossed and turned in bed beside her husband, James.

"What's wrong?" he asked sleepily.

"It's Mr. Souter. People like him really intimidate me."

"Don't let him get to you. Lots of people have helped, and everything's ready. Let it go and get some sleep." James hugged Deborah, then yawned. "I'd like to talk, but you know how soon five a.m. comes." He turned on his side.

What had they gotten into? Deborah thought, as James's breathing quieted and slowed down. Would there be enough money to support Amanuel and Elilta for a year and possibly even longer if necessary? What baggage were they carrying besides their suitcases? What if they had been brutalized and suffered from post traumatic stress disorder?

Deborah glanced at the clock radio. One forty-nine. As she slowly relaxed, fragments of a melody played in her mind. Too exhausted to recall the song's title, she promised herself she'd try to figure it out in the morning.

****

The next afternoon, a speeding transport truck splashed snowy slush against the borrowed van's windshield as Bill, Patricia and Deborah travelled the two hours to the airport.

During a lull in the conversation, Deborah leaned her head against the cold window glass, watching snow settle on stubbly fields and listening to the whistling wind. Listening. She'd learned to do that after Daniel had died. This morning, her first conscious thought had been the melody she'd heard last night. After breakfast, she had searched the large print Psalter Hymnal she'd inherited from her father-in-law and discovered the song she had been looking for – "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming". Why had God chosen to speak to her through the 15th century German hymn? Expectantly, she had read the first stanza: "Lo, how a rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung; of Jesse's lineage coming, as saints of old have sung." Tears had stung her eyes when, in the third stanza, she had read, "This flower, so small and tender, with fragrance fills the air."

"We'll be there in about five minutes," Bill said cheerfully, interrupting her thoughts.

Inside the airport, they waited by the international flights arrival area. Deborah unrolled a poster which stated, "Welcome, Amanuel and Elilta." She held it up. A trickle of tired travellers, which soon grew to a steady stream, exited the opening and closing doors. Grandparents longingly searched the crowd for children and grandchildren. A tanned man carried a surf board. A diminutive woman chattered on a cell phone. Not for the first time, Deborah wondered, what will Amanuel and Elilta be like?

A uniformed man walked through the door, pushing a cart with luggage as a young couple in Western clothes walked closely beside him. The serious young man held the hand of a swayhipped, pregnant woman – about eight months along, Deborah calculated. She looked past the threesome to the door as it opened once again. Where are Amanuel and Elilta? she worried.

"I think that's them!" Patricia exclaimed. "She's pointing at the sign."

The man in uniform approached them. "Are you from Grace Church?" he asked.

They nodded, then warmly greeted Amanuel and Elilta. As Deborah embraced the pregnant woman, Elilta's firm belly pressed against her.

As the new friends walked to the parking lot, Deborah thought about Amanuel and Elilta's baby. The infant would have a fragrance of its own – at times, a sweet, fresh scent, and at other times, the opposite.

Deborah leaned toward Patricia, and quietly said, "I'm going to contact Mr. Souter to tell him we really need his help."

Patricia laughed. "Good idea! Tom's Luv 'Em Diaper Service has exactly what we need."

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, ON.

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Features

God Birth

Mary
said
yes

and

God
was
born

all
because
Mary

was

willing
to
carry

I AM

In
the

cradle

of

her
breakable
body.

Sam Gutierrez

Sam Gutierrez (Samg1977@gmail.com) is pastor to university students through a Christian Reformed Campus Ministry supported by BCSE Classis in Partnership with the Well Church, CRC.

"The first noel"

"The first noel,"
the Angels did say,
"was to certain.

Rejoice, O Israel!
Emmanuel shall come to you
to certain.

Above thy deep and dreamless
sleep,
He comes to
make
the nations prove
the wonders of His love.

The hopes and fears
of all the years
are met.

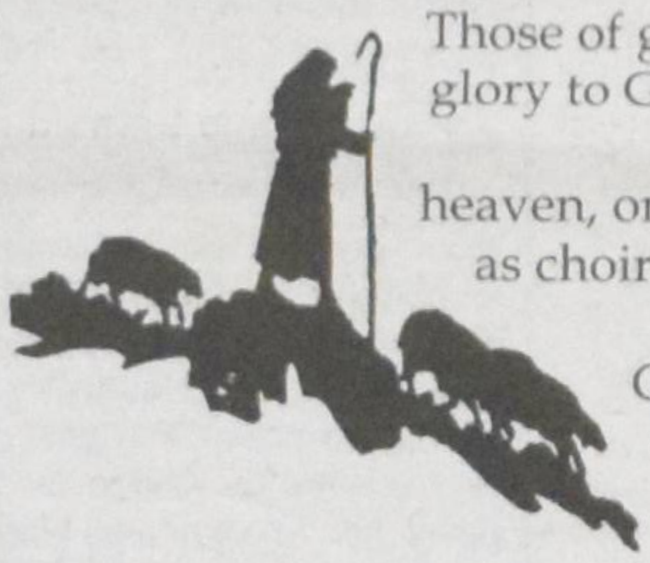
Fall on your knees."

Brett Alan Dewing

Brett is features editor of CC.

Reprise at Christmas

Glory to God in the highest
and peace to all on Earth.



Those of goodwill bring the finest
glory to God. In the highest

heaven, one star still is brightest
as choirs again rehearse:

Glory to God in the highest
and peace to all on Earth.

Ruth Naylor

Ruth Naylor taught English and creative writing in Bluffton, Ohio. She is a member of Spiritual Directors International.

Ceramic work by a well-known Hungarian artist, Margit Kovacs 1902-1977.

The Shepherds

The message about the child as Kurios
seems strange to us – yet we are curious
enough to follow the star to Bethlehem.

Heaven on earth like a tapestry unfurled
promising peace and hope to the world,
somehow bringing harmony again

as sweet as a mother with her child.
Yet is the truth not bitter, never mild?
Have the fears and pains ever ceased?

Do not the troubles return and indeed increase?
Yet – divine love comes terribly from a cross
giving grace at the highest cost.

Frank Sawyer

Frank Sawyer (sawyer@t-online.hu) lives in Hungary, where he teaches philosophy and ethics at Sarospatak Seminary.

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Classifieds

Thank you

I want to **sincerely thank** all the family and friends who helped make my recent 95th Birthday (Oct. 16) such a wonderful day.

Also, I would like to wish everyone a very **Blessed Christmas** and a very **Happy 2011**.

Maria Geuzebroek
Mill Creek Care Centre Room
207W - 286 Hurst Dr, Barrie ON L4N 0Z3

Anniversary

Harry Bick and Yellie Bick (nee **Vanderwerff**)

celebrated their **40th Anniversary** on December 4.
1970 - 2010

With love from their children and grandchildren

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Colossians 3:14

Anniversary

Peter and Anne Hoogendam

Celebrating **60 years of Marriage** on December **19**

Rejoicing with their children:
Cathy & Tony Vyn, *West Lafeyette, Indiana*
Jasper & Jane Hoogendam, *Cobourg, Ontario*
George & Yolanda Hoogendam, *Vineland, Ontario*
Rick & Ineke Hoogendam, *St. Catharines, Ontario*
Alice & Randy Vroon, *Newmarket, Ontario*
Along with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Open House for friends and family on Saturday, December **18** from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Free Reformed Church on Highway 8 in Vineland, Ontario

Best wishes can be sent to: Apt 501 - 400 Vine St, St. Catharines ON L2M 3S3

If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. Genesis 33:15

Obituaries

It is with sadness that we share the news of the death of our husband, father, grandfather and brother,

Lambertus (Bert) Bolderheij

on November 17, 2010 in his 82nd year.

Although his death was expected, the suddenness of his passing was unexpected. He died at home as was his wish. We find our comfort in the fact that he was confident in his Saviour's love and that he was looking forward to going to his Heavenly Home. His testimony can be found in Job 19:23-27, which he took every opportunity to share with those he knew and loved.

We gathered as a family and a community to remember him on Saturday, November 20, 2010 at Grace Christian Reformed Church in Cobourg, Ontario.

The Bolderheij Family
Contact: Mrs Tina Bolderheij
313 Parkview Hills Drive, Cobourg ON K9A 5S3
btbold@sympatico.ca

Denkerk, the Netherlands — Brampton, Ontario
December 11, 1927 — October 11, 2010

The Lord called home

Wijke Rekker

Beloved wife of the late Henk Barens (Dec. 1967).
Dear sister and aunt of:
Anna Riemer (Rekker) *of Guelph*
Flo (Naren Leava) *of Aurora*
Gertie (Fred Ferwerda) *of Guelph*
Garry (Mariella Montgomery) *of Guelph*
Joan (Steve Newmaster) *of Eden Mills*

Helena (Lenie) Meijers-Roorda

1930-2010

Today we say goodbye to our Mom. We have been saying goodbye to her for a very long time. Now she is at peace. She is not in pain. She is herself again; rejoicing with her Lord and reunited with people she loves.

Mom struggled with Alzheimer Disease for many years, the last six of which were spent living in Grove Park Home in Barrie, Ontario. Her decline into illness was painful and slow, but we rejoice in the knowledge that this disease was not remotely able to define her. She was way bigger than Alzheimer's.

Lenie Roorda was born in Amsterdam on February 25, 1930. At the age of seven, she lost her mother. That loss rippled throughout all our lives in both positive and negative ways. As a teenager during WWII, she experienced malnutrition and shortage. And, as many war children did, she learned resourcefulness and frugality. These lessons touched us deeply. In 1949, as a student nurse in Wolfheze, she met Enno Meijers and together they immigrated to Canada to start a new life together. Mom and Dad married in 1952 and moved to Weston, Ontario. Children came quickly and life became full.

In 1976, Mom and Dad moved to South Windsor, Connecticut and to Sioux Center, Iowa in 1980. Although the years in the United States challenged her culturally once again, she found continuity in home, children, projects and bargains. Thankfully, Sally Ann knows no borders.

Mom and Dad returned to Ontario in 1986 and lived in Milton before eventually moving to Barrie in 2000. At each point in her life, Mom made friends quickly and was appreciated for her genuine love and strong sense of justice. She was a woman of strong faith and she modeled her love for Christ in very practical and generous ways.

Mom's rich life was punctuated by the birth and lives of her six children. She loved and protected us ferociously and we, in turn, adored her. She was creative, fun, interesting, loyal and encouraging.

Well done Mom. (Matthew 25:21)

We are: Enno Meijers
Helena (Henk) Top-Meijers — Corinna Meijers
Hinke (Ed) Weening-Meijers — Enno Jan (Ruby Gietema) Meijers
Gloria (Calvin) Van Eek-Meijers — Phyllis (Jeff) Alberts-Meijers

Fifteen grandchildren and four great-grandchildren in Holland and Canada have known and loved their Oma. She will be missed.

Correspondence: Enno Meijers
A-119 282 Hurst Drive, Barrie ON L4N 0Z3

Expressions of sympathy can be made to Grove Park Home, 234 Cook Street, Barrie ON L4M 4H5.

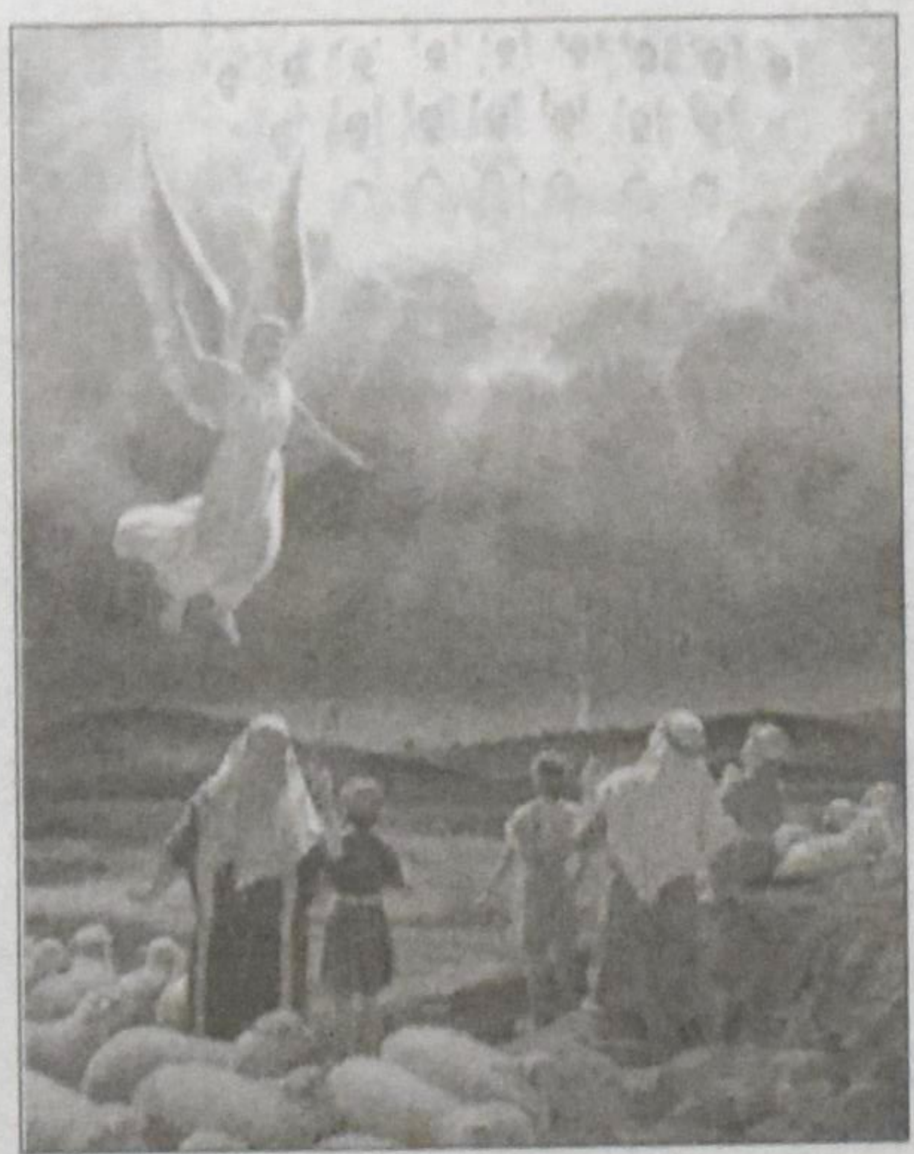
Shalom Manor & Gardens

The residents of Shalom Manor & Shalom Gardens, *Grimsby, Ontario, a Christian Long-Term Care Home and Retirement Centre wish to convey to you, their loved ones and friends, their best wishes for Christmas Season and the New Year of 2011.*

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us... John 1:14

Christmas Greetings from Holland Christian Homes

Lini Grol	HT110
Jenny Hensen	HT502
Tina Spek	HT706
Bertha DeHoop	TT414
John Kooistra	TT301
Mien Staring	HT715
GrietjeSliekers	TT408
Rennie Kamphuis-Schroor	TT508
Helen Reinders	TT206
Dirk & Hendrika Jongkind	FM105
Bill Lennips & Betty Vandeemter	TT615
Tilly Hoekstra	CT405
Corrie VanderWoude	TT506
Willem & Paula Vandermeer	HT713
Harry Roffel	TT516



Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests. Luke 2:14

7900 McLaughlin Road South, Brampton, Ontario www.hch.ca

Job Opportunities / Classifieds

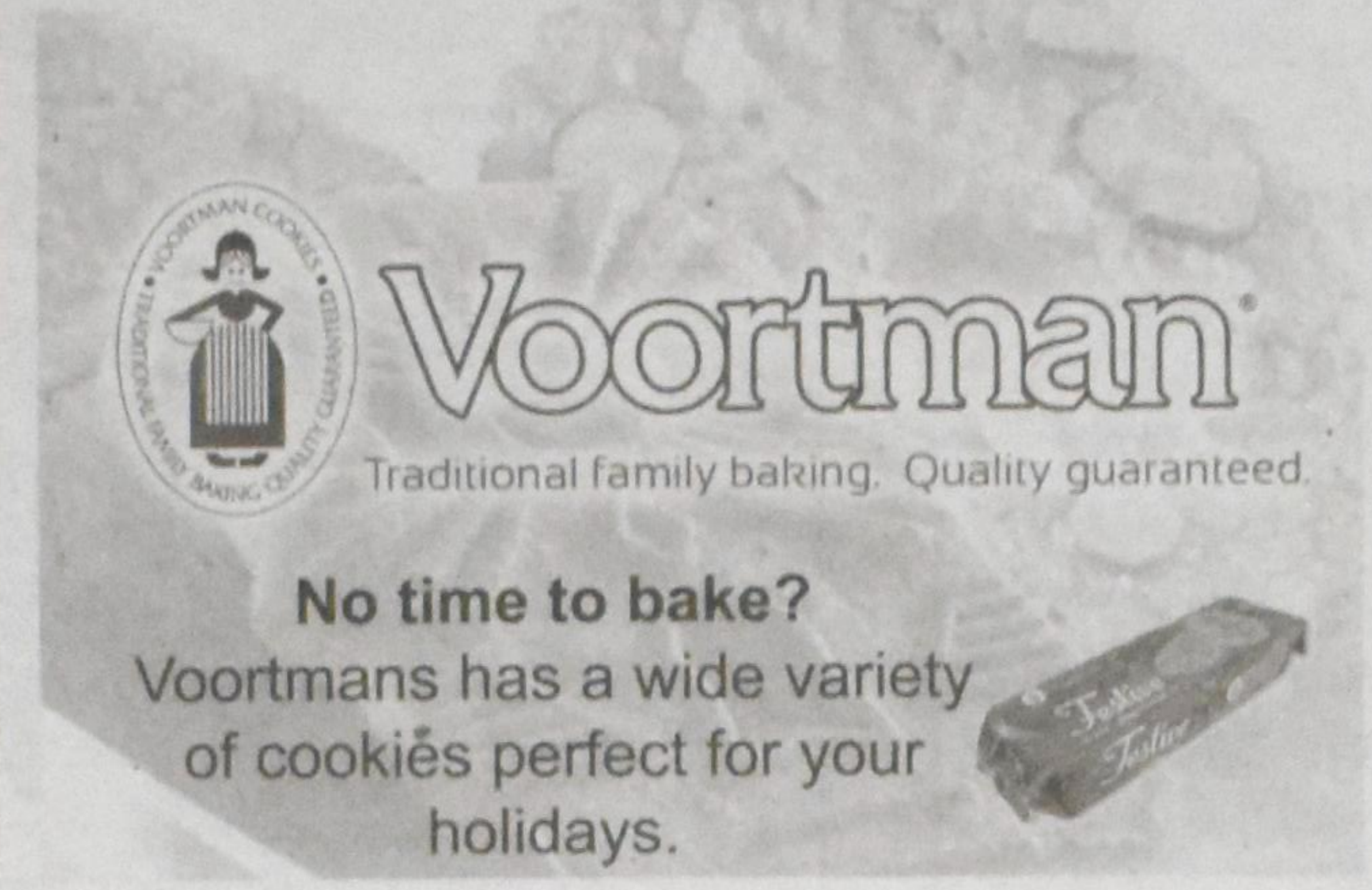
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Dec 11 Christmas sing-a-long concert with the Liberation Choir 7 pm. at Redeemer University in **Ancaster**. See ad.

Jan 9 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Klomps will be preaching.

Feb 18-20 Marriage Encounter weekend. **St. Cathrarines, Ont**. Register at www.reformedme.org

Apr 8-10 Marriage Encounter weekend. **London, Ont**. Register at www.reformedme.org



Christmas commemorates God's personal intervention in human affairs to rescue man from the consequences of his willful rebellion. Just as importantly, it provides a yearly reminder of the subordinate role of politics in the ultimate scheme of things, and the fact that it is ultimately through submission to God's sovereignty that the individual becomes free. Such reminders are valuable in any age, but they are critical in an era in which … our social architects are labouring to organize the world as if God didn't exist.

William Norman Grigg

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Welkom

Shalom Manor and Gardens
a Christian long-term-care Home and Retirement Centre, has openings for

RN's and RPN's.

Please submit your resume to the
Director of Care
12 Bartlett Ave.,
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Fax: 905-945-1211
Email: info@shalommanor.ca

Halifax Christian Academy, located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is recruiting a

principal/administrator

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Our website: www.halifaxchristianacademy.ca

Shalom Manor and Gardens

is seeking a visionary leader to serve as its next

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (Administrator)

Building on the blessings of the past thirty-one years, the Chief Executive Officer will provide Shalom Manor & Gardens with dynamic, faithful leadership as it enters its next stage of development.

The new Chief Executive Officer will continue to build on Shalom Manor and Garden's history of providing outstanding care for elderly Dutch Canadian Christian residents in its Long Term Care Home and Assisted Living Units. Drawing on personal gifts of leadership and team building the CEO will advance the Vision; "Leading the way in quality Christian Retirement and Long-Term Care living".

More information about the position, including a complete Opportunity Profile can be found at www.shalommanor.ca/CEOSearch. Applications for the position are to include a letter of interest and curriculum vitae. Kindly direct applications by email or surface mail in confidence to:

Shalom Manor Search Committee
Mr. Art Dreyer, Co-Chair
Mr. Garry Sytsma, Co-Chair
12 Bartlett Avenue, Grimsby, ON L3M-4N5
or to: CEOSearch@shalommanor.ca

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Principal

Immanuel Christian Elementary School
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Applicants should have an enthusiasm for the Reformed vision of Christian education and have administrative and team-building abilities. Preference will be given to a candidate with administrative experience - a Masters Degree in Education would be an asset. If you would like to join our dynamic two-campus society in providing high-quality Christian education, please reply to:

Corny VanDasselaar - Search Committee Chair
802-6th Avenue North
Lethbridge, AB T1H 0S1

Phone: (403) 328-6380 – Fax: (403) 327-6333
Email: PrincipalSearch@ImmanuelCS.ca

Deadline for Applications is December 15, 2010

Shalom Manor and Gardens requires a

Director of Nursing and Resident Care

Shalom Manor, a Christian, Dutch ethnic, long term care home in the Niagara region, is seeking a Director of Care, who will lead our Nursing Department in sustaining and enhancing an environment of compassionate, gentle care to the residents and families of this community.

The Director of Care is responsible and accountable to the CEO for the administration, organization and management of the Nursing Department.

Qualifications Required:
- Understands and supports the Vision, Mission and Purpose of Shalom Manor and Gardens.
- Meets the Director of Care requirements as set out in the Long Term Care Homes Act.
- Bachelor of Science Nursing degree (BScN) preferred and current registration with the College of Nurses of Ontario as a Registered Nurse.
- Demonstrated team player with outstanding interpersonal skills.
- Demonstrated ability to effectively delegate and hold people accountable, which includes the ability and willingness to address conflict positively and quickly.
- Understanding of the regulatory framework and how to manage within it, producing the most favourable results for optimum funding.

Responsibilities:
- Lead all aspects of resident care in a fiscally responsible manner
- Work cooperatively with the interdisciplinary senior management team
- Oversee CQI and Risk Management, focusing on resident outcomes
- Lead all aspects of Human Resources Management within the Nursing Department
- Develop and maintain Nursing and Infection Control policies and procedures

We offer a competitive salary with an excellent comprehensive benefits package. Qualified applicants may submit a resume in confidence, by fax, or email to:

CEO, Shalom Manor, 12 Bartlett Ave., Grimsby, ON L3M 4N5
Fax: 1-905-945-1211 Email: info@shalommanor.ca

For more information about Shalom Manor and Gardens or this position, please visit our website at www.shalommanor.ca

We appreciate all responses, however, only applicants chosen for an interview will be contacted.

See p. 22 for another job opportunity.

Recently run job ads can be found on our website at: www.christiancourier.ca and click on Reader Resources.

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Odds and Trends
The Christmas Edition
Mendelt Hoekstra

Oberndorf's Silent Night Chapel attracts thousands of hymn-lovers a year.

Top Five Christmas Hymns

***Joy to the World** (1719)*

Isaac Watts is known as the "Father of English Hymnody" as he has written over 750 hymns, including *O God, Our Help in Ages Past,* and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. Joy to the World* is by far his most sung hymn – a response to Psalm 98: "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth." The tune is credited to Handel and was undoubtedly chosen because of the symbolism of its first line. The seven notes in a musical scale connect to seven being a perfect number. The first note of the song starts "in the heavens" and comes in a seven note scale "down to earth."

***Hark! The Herald Angels Sing** (1739)*

Charles Wesley of England is credited with over 6,000 hymns, including *Rejoice, the Lord is King, Christ the Lord is Risen Today,* and *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.* Wesley first published the song under the title "Hymn for Christmas Day." In 1855, fellow Englishman William H. Cummings adapted Mendelsohn's music to fit the lyrics of Wesley, and that is what we sing today.

***O Come, All Ye Faithful** (1743)*

This beloved Christmas carol is attributed to John Francis Wade, an Englishman who fled his country in 1745 with many other Roman Catholics to France after the Jacobite rebellion. Wade wrote the hymn in 1743 but it wasn't sung till after he died in 1786. As time passed, English Catholics began returning to Britain and they brought this song with them, called *Adeste Fidelis.*

In 1845, Rev. Frederick Oakeley of Margaret Street Chapel in London came upon the hymn and translated it. One hundred years between them, but the work of these two men spurs us on to come, joyful and triumphant, to adore Him, Christ the Lord.

***Silent Night** (1818)*

In a small town in Austria, Father Joseph Mohr prepared for the Christmas Eve midnight service. When he found out that the church organ was broken, he penned the German words (*Stille Nacht*) for *Silent Night.* He asked the organist, Franz Gruber, to compose a simple tune to match the words. So on December 24, 1818, *Silent Night* was brought to the world for the first time as a duet, accompanied by a guitar at a church aptly named St. Nicholas in Oberndorf, Austria. It has now been translated into 44 different languages.

***Angels We Have Heard on High** (1862)*

Les Anges dans nos Campagnes (literally, Angels in our countryside) was a French carol dating from the 1700's and appearing in several different versions. *Angels We Have Heard on High* was first published in English in 1862. The harmony in the song is well written and beautiful, especially the "Glo-o-o-o-o-O-o-o-o-o-O-o-o-o-o-O-ri-a, in Excelsis Deo! – Glory to God in the Highest!"

Mendelt Hoekstra is a Music Therapist who gets more requests for these six songs than any others at Christmas. He has been singing them since the end of October.

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Back row: Bert Witvoet, Nelly Westerhoff, Ineke Medcalf, Rose DerNederlanden, Emma Winter
Front: Angela Reitsma Bick, Gary Van Eyk

The staff and board of Christian Courier wish our readers all the blessings of peace – reconciliation with God and with one another – this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

Board:
Gary Van Eyk
Emma Winter
Sylvan Gerritsma
Nelly Westerhoff

Staff:
Ineke Medcalf-Strayer
Rose DerNederlanden
Kim Yungblut
Sonya VanderVeen
Angela Reitsma Bick
Brett Dewing
Bert Witvoet

This is how

God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.

- *1 John 4:9*

May you and our family experience God's great love with peace and joy as we remember the gift of His Son this Christmas and throughout the new year.

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May the Peace and Joy of Christ be yours.

Christmas Greetings to the readers of *Christian Courier* from *Harry Houtman & the Board of Directors*

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